

HIS
STORY

from Creation to glory

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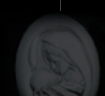
INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *His Story*, a study of God's plan for us that will take us all the way from the first book of the Bible, Genesis, to the last, Revelation. The 66 books of the Bible were written by 40 different authors over a period of 1,500 years. Yet together they unfold one unified story of God's work in human history. When one understands this grand, unifying story, then every passage of Scripture begins to fit together. In contrast, without the big picture people often find themselves disoriented and lost in the Bible as if they were dropped into the middle of a large, complex city driving without a map (or GPS)! This study is designed to provide each of us with that map, that over-arching picture of God's plan for us revealed in Scripture so that we can each begin to accurately understand, deeply appreciate, and meaningfully apply all of the Bible.

The ten lessons in this packet are designed to walk you through the major periods and events in biblical history so that you can see the big ideas that tie things together as well as the important changes that have made each era unique. Our first lesson will look at God's primary purpose in Creation, and our second will focus on how He reaffirms that purpose even after humans fall into sin. The next eight lessons will take us from Abraham to Moses to David and eventually to Jesus Christ, His church, and His future kingdom on earth in the last lesson. We will see how God is moving through history to bring all of His perfect plan to a climatic and wonderful fulfillment.

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Beginnings

Introduction and Creation



INTRODUCTION

To our modern world's assertion that this universe and life on this planet came to exist by chance or by fate, Scripture answers in no uncertain terms:

“In the beginning God created....”

So begins the story of God's involvement with His creation. Yet it is crucial to remember that this is not the beginning of God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have enjoyed perfect, loving fellowship from eternity past (Revelation 1:8; Exodus 3:14).

But at some point in the eternal plan of God, He spoke into the darkness and brought forth light, order, beauty, and life. The account of that creative process is recorded in Genesis 1 and 2 by Moses, the author of the first five books of the Bible. In the first chapter he presents God's creation of the world as a whole, and in the second he focuses on God's particular creation of Adam and Eve.

Read the Key Passages GENESIS 1-2 & PSALM 8

Read **Genesis 1**.

My title for this passage: _____

Many of us struggle to understand how best to reconcile Genesis 1 with seemingly contradictory scientific data. While Christian scholars have surfaced many viable options, we must remember a crucial interpretive key - *always focus on the author's primary purpose*. Our best evidence indicates that Moses did not write this chapter primarily as a scientific lab report or a history textbook of God's creative process. Moses spent his



youth in Egypt along with the rest of the Israelites (see lesson four for this important history). During that time, they would have grown familiar with the Egyptians' own stories about how the world was created. Yet rather than associate creation with Yahweh, the God of Israel and the one true God of heaven and earth, the Egyptians credited creation to their own collection of gods. So Moses wrote Genesis 1 to refute their creation stories and to point people to worship Yahweh instead. He used much of the Egyptians' own language and imagery and even followed a similar order of events. However, Moses made clear that the heavens and earth were created by Yahweh rather than by Egypt's family of gods. Despite numerous similarities in the creation accounts, Moses focused on the key differences:

- ❖ *There was only one God, not many behind creation.*
- ❖ *This one God is eternal and is totally distinct and separate from His creation, not a created part of it or dependent on it.*
- ❖ *This one God created human beings as His unique image-bearers for a special and noble purpose, not as an afterthought.*

Read **Genesis 2**.

My title for this passage: _____

At first glance, Genesis 2 might seem repetitive since it retells the events of creation. Yet it tells these events from a different perspective, a perspective that is much more personal and narrowly focused on God's special creation of one man and one woman. It also reveals God's loving care for human beings, providing Adam with a perfect mate and providing the two of them a beautiful place to live (the garden of Eden), plenty of food to eat (all but one tree), and a significant task to perform ("cultivate and keep" the garden).



Read **Psalm 8**.

My title for this passage: _____

This passage written by king David (See lesson five.) has rightly been called David's commentary on Genesis 1 and 2. He revels in the wonder of God's majesty revealed in the creation of the universe and in God's grace revealed in His choice of human beings to rule this creation.

Interpret the Big Events **CREATION, GLORY, & IMAGE**

1. Why did God decide to create anything? In other words, what is His purpose in creation? Look up Numbers 14:21; Malachi 1:11; and Revelation 5:13-14.

2. Define the term "glory" by looking up 1 Samuel 4:18 (note that the Hebrew word for "glory" can also be translated "heavy") and Psalm 29:1. What is God's glory?



3. How does the non-human part of creation accomplish God's purpose? (See Psalm 19:1-6; 104:24-33; and Romans 1:20.)

4. How does God's creation of humanity accomplish His purpose? In other words, what did He create us to be and how do we fit into His purposes? (See Genesis 1; Psalm 8; and Revelation 5:9-10.)

5. What does the Bible mean when it says that we were created "in the image of God"? In other words, what characteristics connect human beings with God in a way that is true of nothing else on earth? (See Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8:3-6; Daniel 12:2-3; and 2 Corinthians 3:18.)



Gustave Doré's *Creation of Light*



Apply to your Life REALIZING YOUR WORTH

Amanda looks longingly into the tear-streaked face of her youngest daughter, Beth, after yet another difficult day at school. Beth was born with a mild case of Down Syndrome, and while she was demonstrating excellent progress in managing the symptoms of her condition, she could not escape the stares and jokes that followed her as she walked the halls of her elementary school. Her fellow fourth-graders ridiculed her slow walk, her difficulty in reading, and the way she looked.

And the jabs were beginning to take their toll on Beth. She pauses and whispers to her mother, “No one likes me. They all make fun of me.” As much as these words pained Amanda to hear, they were nothing compared to what she said next, “And they’re right. I am stupid. I am slow. I’m so worthless. I wish I wasn’t even born.”

Fighting back tears of her own, Amanda turned to God for words of comfort to share with her daughter. After all, God created Beth, and He certainly doesn’t make mistakes...

Reflection:

Few passages could offer such hope to Amanda as Genesis 1 and Psalm 8. They reveal that all human beings, regardless of mental or physical capacities, are created in the image of God to glorify Him in this life and the next as His kingdom representatives. Therefore, Beth is as valuable a person as any other, for she too is made in the “likeness and image” of God. This is a source of great hope not only to Beth but also to all of us who struggle with our self-image.

- *How would you describe your own self-worth? In other words, are you usually confident and secure in the high value that you have in God’s eyes as His image-bearer, or do you often struggle with feelings of worthlessness or insignificance?*
- *In your own life, what circumstances are most likely to bring up feelings of worthlessness or insignificance?*
- *On the other hand, if you feel that you have a “strong” self-image, what is the basis for your confidence? Is your confidence consistent with a biblical basis for a healthy self-image?*



Apply it this Week:

- *Spend some time right now in thanksgiving. Thank God for creating you as His privileged image-bearer and kingdom representative. Thank Him for giving such transcendent meaning to your life (do you realize that as the kingdom representative of God's eternal, almighty kingdom, you have as much significance and power as the president of any nation on earth?).*

- *We reflect God's image most clearly when we act like Him. In other words, when we are good and holy and loving like He is, we shine His glorious light to our dark world. So how did you do as His image-bearer this last week? Were there things you said or did that failed to live up to His holiness, goodness, and love? If so, what are they?*

- *What exactly will you do differently this week to better reflect God's holiness, goodness, and love (give specifics)?*

Close in Prayer:

End your study by turning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned from this lesson, and ask for His help to put your application into practice.



BONUS QUESTIONS

- Human beings were created uniquely in the image of God to fulfill a great task. Doesn't it seem odd, though, that God created us so much weaker than angelic beings? They appear to be so much stronger than we are, and yet they do not share the privilege of our calling. Why did God create us as such weak creatures? (See Psalm 8; 2 Peter 2:10-11; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29; and 2 Corinthians 4:7.)

- Why did He create angels? (See Hebrews 1:14.)

- What do we learn about the relationship of a man and a woman in marriage in Genesis 1-2?





Interruption

Mankind's Fall into Sin



Study the Key Events

FALL TO BABEL

Recap

The last lesson introduced us to God's primary purpose in creation - to reveal His glory and majesty by establishing His kingdom on earth through human representation. It was man alone whom God created to bear His image and glory on earth. By bringing order and justice to the entire planet through this naturally weak and dependent species, God would display to all the universe how powerful and loving and wise He is. The creation narrative ends as God looks upon all of creation and declares it to be very good!

Introduction

Reading Genesis 1-2 leaves many with a sense of disconnect. Somehow the world as we see it today does not seem to reflect the beauty and "goodness" of what God created. Why is this? How did creation's initial perfection fall apart into the world of suffering, injustice, pain, and hardship we know so well?

This lesson will answer that question by introducing us to a cycle of key interruptions immediately following the creation narrative. With each interruption mankind fails to fulfill God's purposes, yet God reaffirms His intent to establish His kingdom on earth through human representation.

◀ ??

Creation of
Adam and Eve

◀ ??

Sin enters the
human race
through Adam

◀ ??

Cain commits
the first murder

◀ ??

God floods
the earth and
protects Noah

◀ ??

God divides
humanity at
Babel

ancient
period



The Fall

Read **Genesis 3:1-4:8**.

My title for this passage: _____

Read **Romans 5:12-19**.

My title for this passage: _____

Genesis 3:1-19 records perhaps the most regrettable event in all of human history - our first parents' free choice to rebel against God and embrace sin. The serpent who instigated this first human sin was none other than Satan (Revelation 12:9). While Satan was the most beautiful and powerful angel God ever created, yet he some time earlier had chosen to rebel against his Creator (Ezekiel 28:11-19).

Listening to Satan's temptation, Eve and then Adam ate the forbidden fruit. The significance of this choice cannot be overstated for it condemned the human race to the curse of death. In fact, the problem caused by this sin is so severe that it will take the rest of the Bible to unfold God's magnificent solution. Answer these questions to better understand this watershed event.

1. *What is Satan's chief purpose in his interactions with God's creation? In other words, what is he trying to accomplish in this world? (See Genesis 3; Job 1:6-12; Ezekiel 28:11-19; Matthew 4:1-10; and Revelation 12.)*

2. *What methods or techniques does he use to accomplish this purpose?*



3. What exactly is “sin” according to the Bible? (See Genesis 4:7; Judges 20:16 (translated “miss” here); and Romans 3:23.)

4. What consequences resulted from Adam and Eve’s sin for...

☛ ...Adam and Eve personally?

☛ ...Mankind? (See Romans 5:12-21; 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; and Ephesians 2:1-3.)

☛ ...The rest of creation? (See Romans 8:20-22.)

5. Did Adam and Eve’s sin invalidate God’s purpose for humanity? Did it remove or alter God’s “image” in human beings? (For both questions, See Genesis 9:1-7.)

The Flood

Read **Genesis 6:5-22**.

My title for this passage: _____

Shortly after Adam and Eve’s sin and their removal from the garden, their oldest son, Cain, murdered his brother, Abel. Thus began the rapid escalation of human sin recorded in the first chapters of Genesis. Such violence





reached universal proportions by the beginning of chapter 6, leading God to flood His creation and begin afresh with one man.

6. *What led God to choose to save Noah? (See also Hebrews 11:7.)*

7. *How do God's promises to Noah relate to His ultimate purposes for the earth and for mankind? (See also Genesis 9:1-2.)*

Tower of Babel

Read **Genesis 11:1-9**.

My title for this passage: _____

After the Flood God essentially started over with Noah and his family. Mankind was once again to spread out over the earth and glorify God by representing Him. Unfortunately, humanity again undermined God's plans. They gathered together in defiance of God to build a great city and a great tower that would come to be known as Babel.

8. *What purpose did people have in erecting the Tower of Babel? How was this contrary to God's purposes?*

9. *How does God's judgment recorded in Genesis 11:7-9 actually help humanity get back on track as God's kingdom representatives?*





Apply to your Life CONFESSING SIN

With hands still wet from the juice of the forbidden apple, Adam feverishly gathers fig leaves to cover his naked body. He feels so exposed, so shameful to be out in the open, bare before the eyes of heaven. Yet deep down he knows that this shame is not really about his physical nakedness, it is about the choice he just made to disobey God. The decision seemed reasonable, even unavoidable when he made it. Yet as soon as the apple was in his mouth, he began to realize the gravity of his mistake. For the first time in his life, unassailable guilt replaced the joy and peace of Eden. Guilt intensifies as he looks around this lush garden filled with beauty and variety that God had freely given him. "How could I have thrown all this away? How could I have been such a fool!"

And then God arrives, walking through the garden as He had so many times before. And Adam learns a second new experience - fear. "Surely God will punish me!" So he tries to hide from God, and when that fails, he tries to shift the blame of his failure off of himself, saying, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."

Reflection:

Why did Adam choose to act on guilt and fear and hide from God and then deny his sin? The probable reason is that at this point in history Adam had not yet had an opportunity to see God's merciful compassion. He knew his Creator was powerful and good, but he did not yet know that God would or even could offer forgiveness and restoration to one who had sinned. In addition, he did not yet know that this cleansing would be available through confession, the act of acknowledging or admitting our sin to God. As the apostle John will say many thousands of years later, "If we confess our sins, He [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

- *How do you respond to your own failures and sin? Do you quickly accept fault and confess your sin to God and others, or do you tend to "live" in the guilt and shame for a while? Or do you rationalize your sin and shift blame to others?*
- *Why is it difficult for so many Christians to let go of their guilt and trust that God really has completely forgiven and cleansed them? What is it about human nature that rejects this hope?*

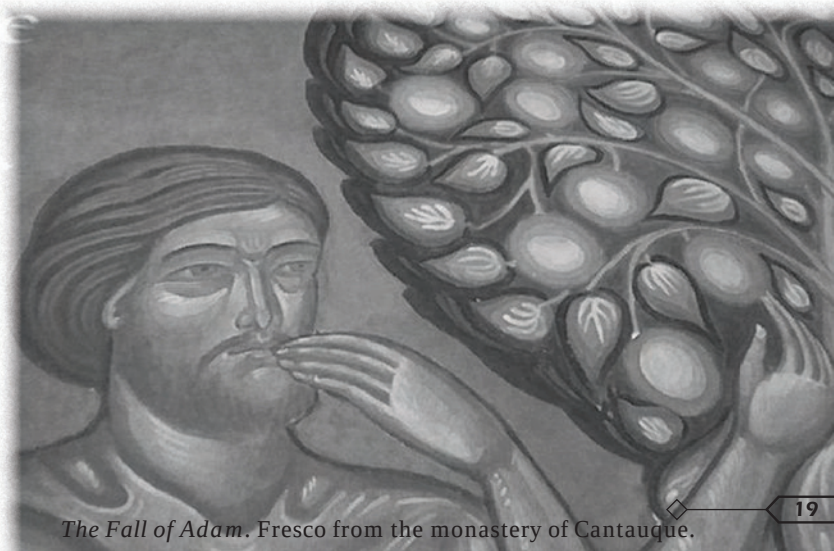


Apply it this Week:

- *Spend some time right now in confession. Are there any sins you've committed recently or even in your past that you haven't yet acknowledged to God? Confess these to Him and ask for His forgiveness. Be specific. For example, "Please forgive me for lying to my friend" rather than "Please forgive me for being a bad person."*
- *Now that you've confessed your sins to the Lord, you need to realize that He really has forgiven and cleansed you completely. To help you in this belief, take some time right now to memorize 1 John 1:9.*
- *Finally, spend some time thanking God that He has forgiven you and will continue forgiving you of sin. Thank Him for sending His Son Jesus whose death and resurrection make it possible for God the Father to forgive us.*

Close in Prayer:

End your study by turning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned from Genesis 3-9, and ask for His help to practice daily confession and to truly believe in His forgiveness and cleansing.



The Fall of Adam. Fresco from the monastery of Cantauque.



Digging Deeper

BONUS QUESTIONS

- To what feeling or desire within Eve does Satan appeal?

- How does Satan misrepresent God's character to Eve?

- What does Genesis 3:15 reveal about God's continued plan for humanity? (Hint: Who will crush Satan on the head? How does the conflict between Satan's seed and the seed of woman relate to the rest of Genesis?)

- Is God's extremely negative assessment of humanity in Genesis 6:5 still true today? What evidence can you give for your answer?

- How does God's judgment of humanity at the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:7-9 demonstrate that He still has the same purpose for humanity? In other words, how does this divine act move humanity in the direction God intended beginning in Genesis 1?





Foundation

Giving of the Abrahamic Covenant



Study the History

ABRAHAM TO JOSEPH

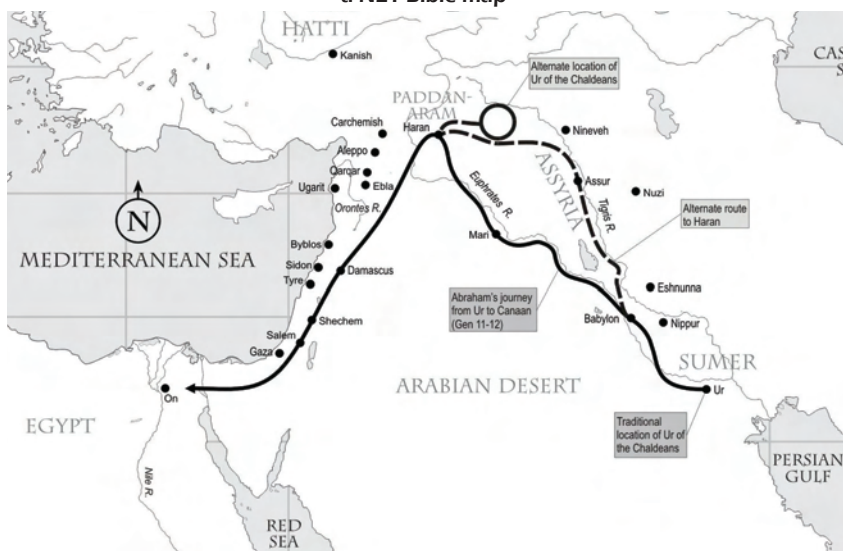
Recap

God created human beings to glorify Him by serving as His kingdom representatives on earth. Yet as we studied in the last lesson, this purpose was interrupted by humanity's fall into sin. Adam and Eve's disastrous choice to disobey God brought physical and spiritual death to our entire race. Sin became the natural bent for all of their descendents, as evidenced by mankind's rapid descent into pride, violence, and immorality. God brought world-wide judgment upon this sin in both the flood and in His scattering of humanity at the tower of Babel. If mankind as a united group would not return to Him, He would begin to bring restoration to humanity through a single man...

God's Call

After Babel God narrowed His dealings with mankind to one specific individual, named Abraham (or Abram as he was known earlier in his life) who came from a pagan family and culture. God first appeared to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldeans and commanded him to leave his family and come to the unknown land of Canaan. Abraham accompanied his family to Haran where God once again appeared to him after his father died saying ...

Abraham's Journey a NET Bible map



- ancient period
- ?? Tower of Babel incident

- c. 2160 BC Abraham born to Terah

- c. 2095 BC Abraham enters Canaan

- c. 2065 BC Isaac born to Abraham

- c. 2006 BC Jacob born to Isaac

- c. 1876 BC Jacob moves his family to Egypt



"Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Genesis 12:1-3

Lessons in Obedience

Following God's second call, Abraham departed Haran, still followed by his nephew, Lot, and finally came to the land of Canaan. But a severe famine led Abraham to take his wife, Sarah, and the rest of his family to Egypt. Despite God's promise of protection, out of fear Abraham lied to Pharaoh, the Egyptian king, about Sarah's identity and passed her off as his sister. Yet God intervened and protected Sarah, and returned the family to Canaan. Unfortunately, Abraham committed a similar deception some years later (Genesis 20:1-2). Yet at times Abraham demonstrated great faith, as when he courageously came to Lot's rescue and, as a result, received the blessing of God (Genesis 14). Following this blessing, God formally ratified His promises to Abraham in a covenant recorded in Genesis 15.

Patriarchs

After Abraham and Sarah finally gave birth to their own son, Isaac, God extended His covenant promises to this chosen son. Isaac married Rebekah and together conceived twins named Esau and Jacob. Despite being slightly younger and occasionally deceptive, Jacob received the covenant promises from Isaac and passed these promises to his twelve sons who became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. One of these sons, Joseph, became a ruler in Pharaoh's court and led his family to Egypt to escape a new famine that struck Canaan.

On what basis do Isaac and Jacob inherit the promises originally extended to Abraham? (See Genesis 26:3-5 and Romans 9:6-13.)



Read the Key Passages

GENESIS 15, 17, 22

Read the following passages in **Genesis**.

- ☐ 15:1-21
- ☐ 17:1-22
- ☐ 22:1-18

Key themes I notice in Abraham's story:

Interpret the Big Events

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Abraham is one of the most important people in all of biblical history. The covenant God made with this man and his descendants sets the foundation of promises that the rest of the Bible, and particularly the narrative of redemption, is based upon. It is through this covenant that God's purpose for humanity on earth will be restored and fulfilled. Answer the following questions about this covenant and include one or more references from the above passages in support of your answers.

1. Type: Based on the definition of "covenant" given in the Biblical Covenants chart in the Appendix (pages 90-91), what type of ancient covenant does the Abrahamic Covenant best match up with, "grant" or "suzerain-vassal"? What differences are there between this ancient type of covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant?

2. Duration: How long was this covenant expected to last (in other words, was this covenant a temporary or an eternal agreement)?



3. Promises: What exactly did God promise to give to or do for Abraham and his descendents in this covenant?

4. How would you describe Abraham's spiritual condition when God first called him? (See Joshua 24:2-3 and Acts 7:2-4.)

5. What was God's purpose in choosing Abraham to receive this covenant? (See Genesis 18:17-19.)

6. As we studied last week, all of Adam's children have a fatal sin problem that prevents us from fulfilling God's purpose for our lives. How does God provide a model for His ultimate solution to the sin problem? (See Genesis 15:5-6 and Romans 4:1-5.)





Apply to your Life WALKING IN FAITH

"Why, oh why, did I have to marry such a beautiful woman?" Abraham asks himself as he and Sarah enter the land of king Abimelech. He had known more than a few men put to death by powerful kings who had eyes for their attractive wives. And no woman in the caravan could compare to his Sarah. His anxiety peaks as one of the king's soldiers approaches to register the travelers. "Surely this guard will notice Sarah's exceeding beauty. Oh no, he's seen her and smiled! He's motioning to the other soldiers and they're coming this way."

"State your name and relations," demands the soldier.

Abraham could already picture the knife that the king's assassin would use to kill him while he slept - that is, if he was even left alive until night-fall! So in an instant of intense fear, Abraham ensures his own safety by lying to the guard,

"I am Abraham and this is my sister."

Seeing such a beautiful woman without a husband, the guard dutifully takes her from Abraham's side to be one of the king's many concubines...

Reflection:

Sadly, this incident recorded in Genesis 20 was not the first time that Abraham doubted God's protection and, giving into fear, passed Sarah off as his sister rather than his wife. In both cases, Abraham's self-protection put Sarah at great risk physically and emotionally. Fortunately, God delivered Sarah in both cases, but not before Abraham's reputation in the land of Canaan was badly damaged due to his deception. By giving into fearful anxiety instead of walking by faith, Abraham failed to live as God's kingdom representative.

➤ *Do you ever feel fear or anxiety? If so, what causes these feelings?*

➤ *How do you respond to anxiety? Has this response proven effective at lessening your anxiety?*





Apply it this Week:

- *Spend some time reflecting on the sources of fear and anxiety in your life. For each source, complete this phrase, “When I am anxious/fearful about _____, it demonstrates that I doubt God _____.”*
example: “When I am anxious about my finances, it demonstrates that I doubt God will fulfill His promise to provide for all my needs.”

- *What lie are you believing about God, yourself, or your circumstances that causes you to live in fear rather than faith?*

- *What specific truth will you meditate on this week to better handle anxiety? What exact action will you take (be specific)?*
example: when I feel anxious I will pause and read Psalm 23 to remind myself that God is my faithful shepherd.

- *Whom, other than the Lord, will you ask to help you follow through with this application?*

Close in Prayer:

End your study by turning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned from Abraham’s example, and ask for His help to follow through on your application.



BONUS QUESTIONS

- Take a moment to fill out the Biblical Covenants chart on pages 90-91.

- **Nature:** Is this covenant conditional (fulfillment of the promises depends on Abraham in some way) or unconditional (promises will be fulfilled regardless of what Abraham does) or some mixture of both? To answer this question, consider the following:
 - How well does Abraham obey over the course of his life? Does his obedience improve with time?

 - How does God respond to Abraham's disobedience? (See Genesis 12:10-20; 13:1-9; 16:1-14; and 20:1-18.)

 - How does the command to be circumcised in Genesis 17 affect God's promises to Abraham? (See also Exodus 4:24-26.)

 - How does Abraham's amazing obedience in Genesis 22:1-18 affect the promises?

 - Does later Scripture attribute the blessings to God's promise, Abraham's obedience, or both? (See Genesis 26:1-5.)





Constitution

Giving of the Mosaic Covenant



Study the History

JOSEPH TO MOSES

Recap

The last lesson introduced us to the Abrahamic Covenant, the foundation of God's gracious promises to Abraham and his descendants: Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve tribes of Israel. This covenant included the promise of land (the promised land of Canaan), seed (countless descendants), and blessing (for Abraham's family and for the world at large). When God gave this covenant to Abraham as recorded in Genesis 15, He prophesied that Abraham's descendants would not inherit the promised land of the covenant before they experienced 400 years of oppression in Egypt.

Slavery

Almost 400 years after Jacob brought his twelve sons to Egypt, the number of Israelites had grown so large that they posed a threat to the Egyptians. So Pharaoh forced the Israelites into slavery and ordered the death of every male Israelite infant. God responded to the cry of His people and raised up Moses to deliver them. Yet after murdering an Egyptian for beating an Israelite, Moses fled Egypt in fear of his life.

patriarchal
period

life in Egypt

exodus

◀ c.1884 BC

Joseph made an official in Egypt

◀ c.1876 BC

Jacob moves his family to Egypt

◀ c.1504 BC

Slavery begins during reign of Pharaoh Thutmose III

◀ c.1446 BC

First Passover and Exodus

◀ c.1446 BC

Giving of the Mosaic Covenant

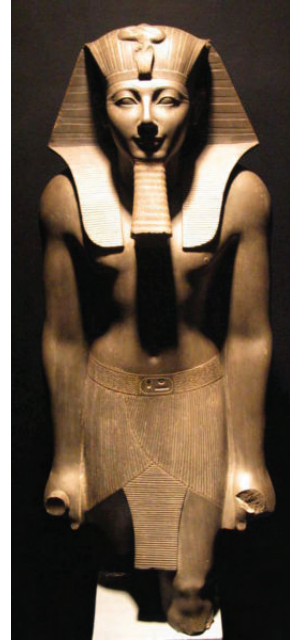




Plagues & Passover

After Pharaoh's death, God sent Moses back to Egypt to deliver the Israelites from slavery. However, the new Pharaoh repeatedly refused Moses' request even after God began to unleash horrible plagues upon the Egyptians. Pharaoh's stubborn hardness endured until God's tenth plague brought the death of every firstborn Egyptian son. The Israelite children survived this night of death by having the blood of sacrificed lambs painted across the door posts of their homes at God's instruction. This event, called the "Passover," has been reenacted by the Jewish people ever since. After this final plague Pharaoh and the people of Egypt begged the Israelites to leave.

What is the significance of the Passover? (See Exodus 12:23-27 and 1 Corinthians 5:7.)



Pharaoh Thutmose III who enslaved the Israelite people and ordered the death of their infant sons. Statue in Luxor museum.

Exodus

As the Israelites fled Egypt, Pharaoh changed his mind and led an army to recapture them. But God intervened by parting the Red Sea so that His people could escape, and then releasing the waters to drown the pursuing Egyptian soldiers. Yet despite this miraculous deliverance, the Israelites grumbled repeatedly on their journey to the mountain of Sinai, displeased with God's provision. At Sinai, God established Israel as a distinct nation under Moses' leadership through a new "constitution" known as the Mosaic Covenant.

How does God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt relate to the Abrahamic Covenant? (See Exodus 6:2-8.)



Read the Key Passages EXODUS & DEUTERONOMY

Read **Exodus 24:1-8**.

My title for this passage: _____

Read **Deuteronomy 5**.

My title for this passage: _____

Read **Deuteronomy 28:1-6, 15-19; 30:1-11**.

My title for this passage: _____

Interpret the Big Events THE MOSAIC COVENANT

The passages above introduce us to the second key biblical covenant of the Old Testament, the Mosaic Covenant. This covenant was given by God through Moses to the Israelites about 1500 BC and includes within it God's commands and requirements for His people, which the Bible refers to from this point on as God's "Law." This Law serves as a key theme for the remainder of the Old Testament and much of the New Testament. Answer the following questions about this covenant, and include one or more references from the above passages in support of your answers.

1. Type: Based on the definitions given in the Biblical Covenants chart in the Appendix (pages 90-91), what type of ancient covenant does the Mosaic Covenant best match up with, "grant" or "suzerain-vassal"?

2. Duration: How long was this covenant expected to last (in other words, was this covenant a temporary or an eternal agreement)?

3. Promises: What exactly did God promise to give to or do for the Israelites in this covenant?

4. Nature: Is this covenant conditional or unconditional. In other words, does God's fulfillment of the covenant promises depend on the Israelites' actions in any way? Or is the fulfillment based solely on the power and faithfulness of God?

5. How do the promises of the Mosaic Covenant relate to the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant? Do they replace them, modify them, complement them, or stand completely independent of them? (See Exodus 6:2-8; 32:7-14; and Galatians 3:15-18.)

6. According to the following passages, what were two deficiencies of the Mosaic Covenant and its Law?

❖ Galatians 2:16; 3:11, 21; and Hebrews 10:1-4

❖ Deuteronomy 5:29; Romans 7:8-13; and 8:3-4





Apply to your Life GRUMBLING & COMPLAINING

Egypt, full of grasslands, and plentiful meat and grain... Egypt, divided in half by the cool waters of the Nile river...

Such memories flood the mind of Mahlah and many of the other Israelites as they enter their third week of travel through the parched desert of the Sinai peninsula. The constant travel, the hot sun, the lack of tasty food... all of this begins to crush the joyful optimism she had felt when Moses first led them out of Egypt. God had miraculously provided water from bare rocks and bread from the sky. But two weeks on nothing but bread! Two weeks without rest. Two weeks without the cool shade of the trees she remembered near the Nile. Yes, she had been a slave in Egypt, but even a slave in a country as lush as Egypt was more privileged than a free woman wandering the waste of Sinai! These thoughts and more Mahlah begins to share with her fellow travelers, who prove to be a sympathetic audience. They all begin to doubt their decision to follow Moses. What kind of lunatic leads a nation into the desert!? Perhaps the God Moses claimed to know wasn't right in the head either. Maybe it was time to look for a new leader....

Reflection:

Throughout their time in the wilderness, the majority of the Israelites grumbled and complained against God and His servant, Moses. Rather than dwell on the many miraculous things God was doing to care for their needs (water from rocks, manna from heaven, safety through the desert, etc.), they chose to focus on what they lacked. Rather than give thanks, their complaining led them to consider rebellion.

- *Are you generally content with the life you have, or are there aspects of your life that you are discontent with (i.e. money, relationships, career, possessions, etc.)?*

- *What are you most grateful for in life (create a brief list below)?*



Apply it this Week:

- *Do you ever find yourself complaining to other people about someone or something? What are you most tempted to complain about?*
- *What lie are you believing about God, yourself, or your circumstances that causes you to complain?*
- *What specific truth will you meditate on this week to avoid the temptation to complain? What exact action will you take (be specific)?*
example: spend five minutes every morning reviewing your “grateful” list and thanking God for each item on it
- *How can we find contentment and gratitude when we are suffering or lacking something we really need or long for?*

Close in Prayer:

End your study by turning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned, and ask for His help to follow through on your application.





BONUS QUESTIONS

- Take a moment to fill out the Biblical Covenants chart on pages 90-91.
- List out the reasons why God gave the Israelites the many laws contained in this covenant as revealed in the following passages. Which of these purposes continue to be in effect for God's people today?
 - 1 Peter 1:15-16 and Romans 7:12
 - Galatians 3:19, 22
 - Leviticus 10:3; 11:44-45; and Psalm 24:3-5
 - Galatians 3:24; Luke 24:25-27, 44
 - Exodus 19:5-8
 - Leviticus 23:26-32
 - Leviticus 1:1-9; 2:1; 3:1-4; 4:1-3; 5:5-7; 6:9; 7:1-4
- If the Law had the two serious deficiencies identified previously, in what sense was it an improvement over the system under which the people had been living?
- In this covenant, God promised to reward Israel's obedience with material prosperity. Is this same promise available to believers today? In other words, should a faithful Christian expect to be blessed with health, peace, and financial prosperity? Why or why not?





Dominion

Giving of the Davidic Covenant



Study the History

MOSES TO DAVID

Recap

The last lesson introduced us to the Mosaic Covenant, the second of God's four biblical covenants with Abraham's descendents, the Israelites. In this covenant, God graciously revealed His law which served as the standard by which He would either reward or discipline the Israelites. When they obeyed, they would receive the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. But when they disobeyed, they would be disciplined. While the Mosaic Covenant did reveal the obedience God required for fellowship with Himself, it did not provide either the desire or the spiritual enablement to obey. Thus, the following history of the Israelites reveals their repeated failures to obey God.

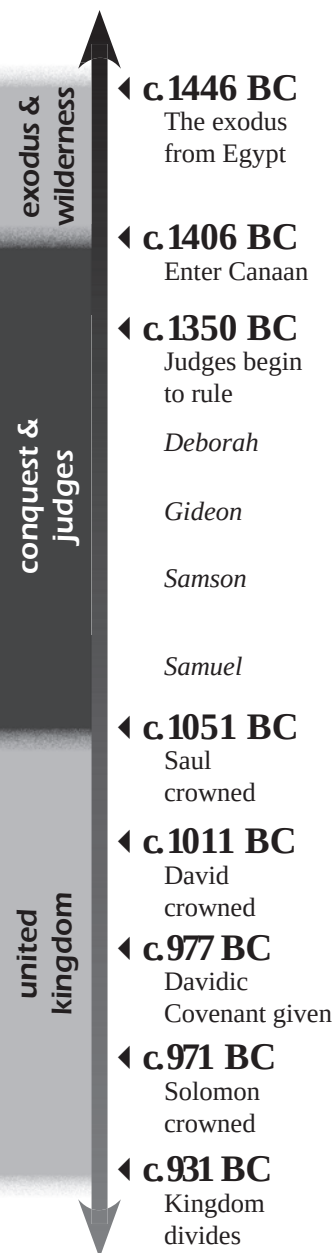
Wilderness

After giving the nation of Israel the Mosaic Covenant at Sinai and setting aside the tribe of Levi to be His priests, with Aaron as high priest, God led the approximately 1 million Jews to the region of Kadesh-Barnea on the border of Canaan, the promised land. Yet despite God's constant faithfulness, His people complained against Him throughout their journey and refused to enter Canaan because they feared the land's inhabitants. So God judged that faithless generation by condemning them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

Conquest

After Moses' death, Joshua was appointed leader over the nation of Israel. He led them over the Jordan River and through a series of stunning victories against the mighty inhabitants of Canaan. Each tribe received a specific allotment of land within Canaan as a permanent inheritance. Despite their success, the nation failed to completely remove the inhabitants from the land as God had commanded.

According to Numbers 33:51-56 and Judges 2:1-4, what resulted from Israel's disobedience?





Judges

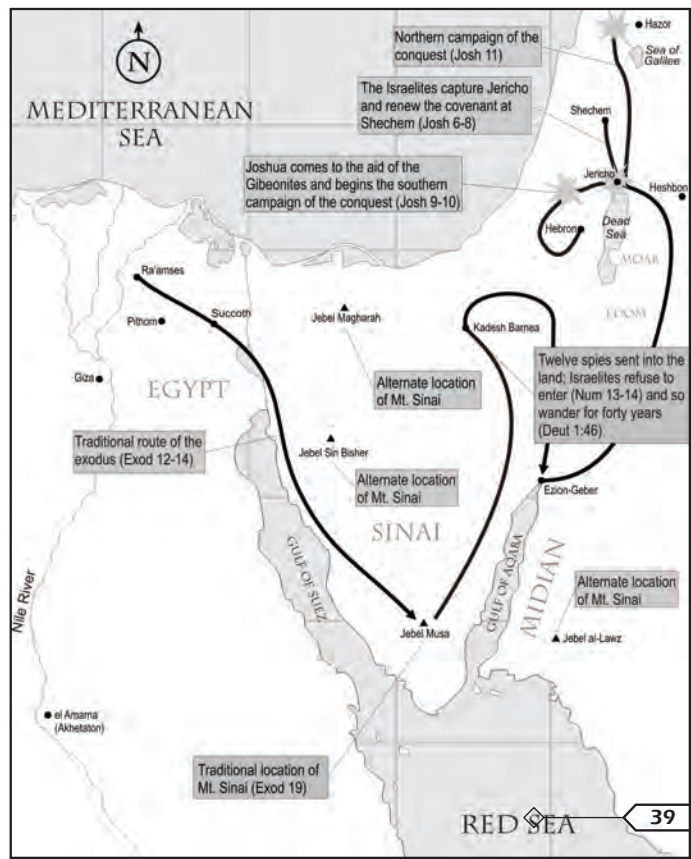
During this 300-year period, the nation of Israel had no central government. They lived as twelve relatively independent tribes and experienced a repeated cycle of events: (1) the Israelites rebelled against God; (2) God responded by allowing foreign nations to oppress them; (3) the Israelites cried out to God for deliverance; (4) He raised up a judge who delivered them and ruled Israel for a short time; (5) after the judge died, the people again rebelled.

According to Judges 21:25, what was the spiritual climate during this period of Israel's history?

United Kingdom

This 120-year period began when the nation requested Samuel, the last judge, to provide a king. With God's direction Samuel crowned Saul, a handsome man who perfectly fit the nation's expectations. Yet Saul disobeyed God on multiple occasions. So God directed Samuel to David, a "man after God's own heart." David was anointed as Israel's future king at a young age, but he had to endure many years of persecution from Saul before actually becoming king. During the reigns of David and his son Solomon, the kingdom of Israel reached military and economic heights unparalleled before or since that time.

**Map of Exodus,
Wilderness, and
Conquest**
a NET Bible map





Read the Key Passages

2 SAMUEL 7 & PSALM 89

Read **2 Samuel 7:1-17**.

My title for this passage: _____

Read **Psalms 89:1-4, 27-37**.

My title for this passage: _____

Interpret the Big Events

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

In the passages above, we are introduced to the third key biblical covenant of the Old Testament, the Davidic Covenant. This covenant was given by God to David and his descendants around 1000 BC. Similar to the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, the covenant with David becomes a major theme of scripture from this point forward and greatly influences the New Testament, especially the life of Christ and the end times recorded in Revelation. Answer the following questions to better understand this important covenant. Include one or more references from the above passages in support of your answers.

1. Type: Based on the definitions given in the Biblical Covenants chart in the Appendix (pages 90-91), what type of ancient covenant does the Davidic Covenant best match up with?

2. Duration: How long are the Davidic Covenant's promises in effect (is this a temporary or an eternal covenant)?

3. Promises: What promises does God make to David, his descendants, and the nation in this covenant?



4. Nature: Is the covenant conditional or unconditional? In other words, is the fulfillment of the above mentioned promises dependent on David or his descendants' actions? Or is the fulfillment based solely on the power and faithfulness of God?

5. Why haven't we seen a Davidic king in Israel for many years (or even now)? (See 2 Chronicles 7:17-22 and Hosea 3:4-5.)

6. How do the promises of the Davidic Covenant relate to:

- the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant (Isaiah 11:1-10)?
- the regulations of the Mosaic Covenant (2 Chronicles 7:17-22)?





Apply to your Life SUBMITTING TO AUTHORITY

The cave was dark and cool, a stark contrast to the bright heat that oppresses the En Gedi hills near the Dead Sea of Israel. While David and his men hide deep within the recesses of this refuge, King Saul, ever jealous of this younger man, leads his vastly superior force in a relentless search for him over the nearby hillsides. David knows that Saul will stop at nothing to put him to death.

Yet excitement suddenly replaces David's fears! Could his eyes be deceiving him, or is king Saul about to make the greatest blunder of his life? Yes, foolish Saul, seeking a cave to use as a latrine, unwittingly enters David's refuge alone and unprotected and comes within mere feet of David's hiding place. In that instant David receives a momentous opportunity. God had already anointed him to be Israel's future king, and since that time, David had distinguished himself as a better warrior, better leader, and more faithful worshipper than Saul. Wrestling with these facts, David hears the encouragement of his men hiding nearby to reach out his sword and kill the mad tyrant, to take the throne that will be his...

Reflection:

David reveals his godly character in this incident from 1 Samuel 24. Even after years of enduring Saul's cruel jealousy, he chose to spare the life of the king and honor Saul's God-given position. David recognized that submission to this unworthy tyrant was actually submission to the God who had sovereignly appointed Saul to be king.

- *Who has God placed in authority over you (e.g. parents, spouse, teachers, boss, elders, government officials, etc.)?*
- *Has it been easy to submit to their authority? Why or why not?*
- *Describe submission to authority. Does it include our attitudes or just our actions?*
- *One of the best gauges of our submission to authority is what we say about those in authority over us when they are not present. Do your words honor those in authority over you or do you tend to complain about their leadership?*



Apply it this Week:

- *Of all those in authority over you, who is the one person you find most challenging to honor or follow?*
- *What exactly will you do differently this week in word or deed to show greater honor to this particular person (be specific)?*
- *Whom, other than the Lord, will you ask to help you follow through with this application?*

Close in Prayer:

End your study by turning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned from David's example, and ask for His help to follow through on your application.



Guercino's *Saul attacking David*, 1646.



Digging Deeper BONUS QUESTIONS

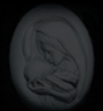
- Take a moment to fill out the Biblical Covenants chart on pages 90-91.

- Both Saul and David sinned grievously during their reigns. Why did Saul's sin lead to the loss of his kingdom while David's did not? Compare Saul's sins in 1 Samuel 13:5-14 and 15:1-35 to David's in 2 Samuel 11:1 - 12:15 and Psalm 51.

- According to Deuteronomy 17:14-20, what type of man did God desire to be king of His people?

- While the above passage as well as Genesis 49:8-12 ("the scepter... ruler's staff") imply that God planned for Israel to have a king, 1 Samuel 8:1-22 indicates that He was offended by His people's actual request for a king. Look up these passages and explain this seeming contradiction.





Hope amidst Decline

Giving of the New Covenant

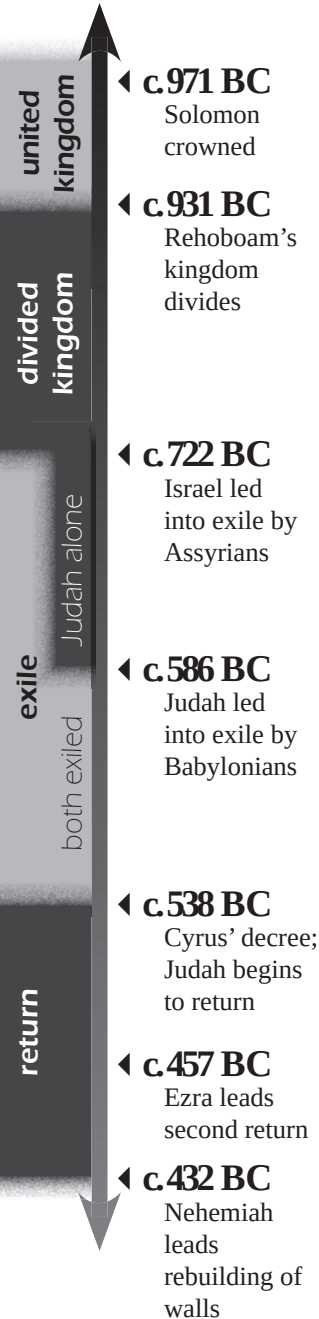


Study the History

SOLOMON TO NEHEMIAH

Recap

In the previous lesson we studied the Davidic Covenant, the third of God's four biblical covenants with Abraham's descendents, the Israelites. In this covenant, God promised to give David a never-ending line of descendents (a "house") who would always have the right to rule from Jerusalem (the "throne") over the people of Israel (the "kingdom"). This three-fold promise is unconditional and eternal, yet God reserved the right to temporarily remove David's descendents from the throne if they disobeyed the Mosaic Law.



Divided Kingdom

Sadly, David's son Solomon chose to disregard God's Law and worshipped the false gods of his many wives. As a result, God chose to remove most of the kingdom from his son, Rehoboam. Shortly after being crowned king, Rehoboam disregarded the people's complaints of heavy taxation and forced labor, and he chose instead to increase their burdens. This led the northern ten tribes to split off into their own kingdom, called "Israel," and left Rehoboam with only two tribes which became the southern kingdom of Judah. Israel had a succession of evil kings while Judah had a mix of good and evil kings.

How does the divide of the kingdom relate to the covenants (see 1 Kings 11:29-39)?

Exile

In the years of the divided kingdom, the Israelites fell from their height of power to their ruin. The northern kingdom of Israel eventually fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC followed by the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah to the Babylonians in 586 BC. Assyrian and Babylonian foreign policy dictated the deportation



and dispersion of conquered peoples from their native lands in order to more easily ensure their subjugation and assimilation. While the 10 tribes of Israel failed to maintain their ethnic and religious identity during their 110 years in Assyrian captivity, the two tribes of Judah did preserve their identity during the 70 years in Babylonian captivity and continued to study and obey God's Law.

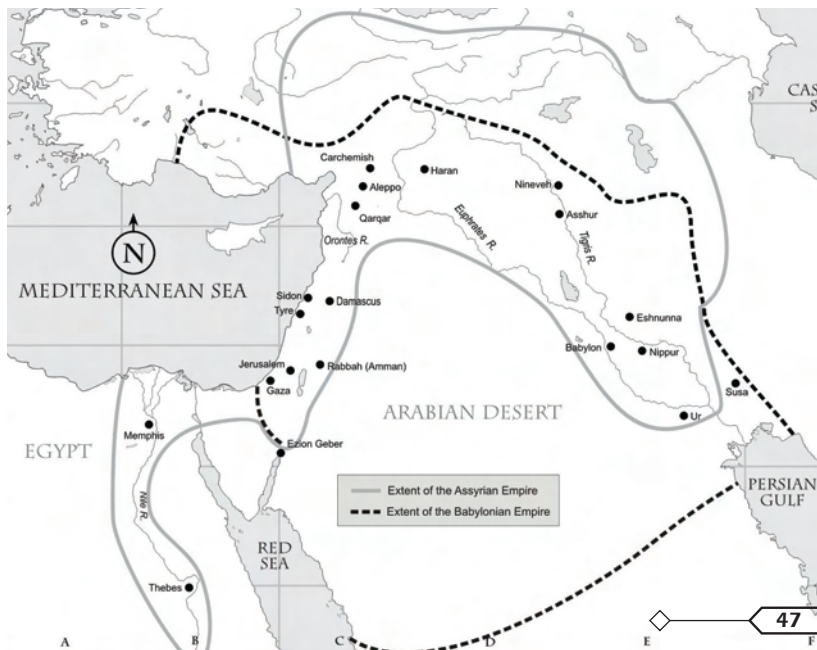
How do the exiles of Israel and Judah relate to the covenants? (See Jeremiah 25:1-11, 29:10-14.)

Return

With the fall of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires, the Jews were allowed to return to their native land by the decree of the Persian king Cyrus. However, only 50,000 exiles returned to the land with their leader Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple. Later, a Jewish scribe named Ezra led another group of exiles back to restore worship at the rebuilt temple. Finally, Nehemiah led a group that rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. While these victories restored some measure of peace and prosperity to Judah, they were still subject to the Persian empire. In contrast, the ten tribes of Israel never returned to their land after their Assyrian captivity.

Map of the Assyrian and Babylonian Kingdoms

a NET Bible map





Read the Key Passages JEREMIAH 31 & EZEKIEL 36

Read **Jeremiah 31:31-40**.

My title for this passage: _____

Read **Ezekiel 36:22-38**.

My title for this passage: _____

Interpret the Big Events THE NEW COVENANT

These prophetic passages were written around 600 BC during the years of exile. They introduce us to the New Covenant, the fourth and final key biblical covenant of the Old Testament. God promised this covenant to both Israel and Judah. Yet unlike the previous covenants, it was not yet enacted - its promises were not yet put in effect. Instead, God allowed the hope of this future covenant to inspire His people until His Messiah, who would enact the covenant, would come. We'll learn much more about this Messiah in the next lesson. Answer the following questions to better understand this important covenant.

1. Type: Based on the definitions given in the Biblical Covenants chart in the Appendix (pages 90-91), what type of ancient covenant does the New Covenant best match up with?

2. Duration: Once activated, how long would the New Covenant's promises be in effect?

3. Promises: What promises does God make to the nations of Israel and Judah in this covenant?



4. Nature: Is the covenant conditional or unconditional? In other words, is the fulfillment of the above mentioned promises dependent on the Israelites' actions? Or is the fulfillment based solely on the power and faithfulness of God?

5. How is the New Covenant an improvement over the Mosaic Covenant? To answer this, compare Deuteronomy 5:28-29 to Ezekiel 36:26-28.

6. How do the promises of the New Covenant relate to:

- the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant? (Compare Genesis 12:1-3 and 15:5 with Ezekiel 34:26-29 and 36:37-38.)
- the regulations of the Mosaic Covenant? (See Hebrews 7:18-19 and 8:6-13.)
- the promises of the Davidic Covenant? (See Ezekiel 37:24-28 and Acts 2:29-33.)



Apply to your Life FINDING HOPE IN LIFE

"Why should we return to Israel, Simon? Here in Babylon we have a nice home and you earn more money in the market in one day than you'd earn in a month back in Israel." She was right. Returning to the land of their ancestors would cost them greatly. They would be exchanging the financial freedom and luxuries they enjoyed in Babylon for months of travel, a primitive campsite, and constant fear of attack from the surrounding peoples. Why should they go when they have so much here?

And yet Simon knew that leaving Babylon was God's will for His family. It was time to take their children out of this city that was full of idolatry and bent on materialism. It was time to return to the land God had given their descendents so long ago. And it was time that he began to rest his hopes not on his promising business but on God's promises shared through the prophets. "God, help my family to desire the right things – not wealth and luxury but righteousness. Help us to live for Your desires and not our own. Please, Lord, give us the courage to leave this comfortable place and go where you call, even if poverty and danger accompany us."

Reflection:

Throughout history, God has frequently called His people to step out in faith and take great risks. But this requires that we place our hope not in the things of this world, but in the sure promises of God. The Jewish exiles living in Babylon faced just such a choice when Cyrus decreed that they could return and rebuild Jerusalem. Many chose to stay in Babylon because it offered great wealth and comfort. But a few trusted God enough to exchange this comfort and wealth for poverty, danger, and hardship. And through these individuals, God restored the nation of Israel and prepared them to receive the New Covenant through their Messiah, Jesus Christ..

- *What do you hope for in the future? Are your hopes fixed on things in this life (money, power, fame, possessions, etc.) or on things in the next life?*

- *When your circumstances don't work out as you planned, do you get frustrated? Why?*



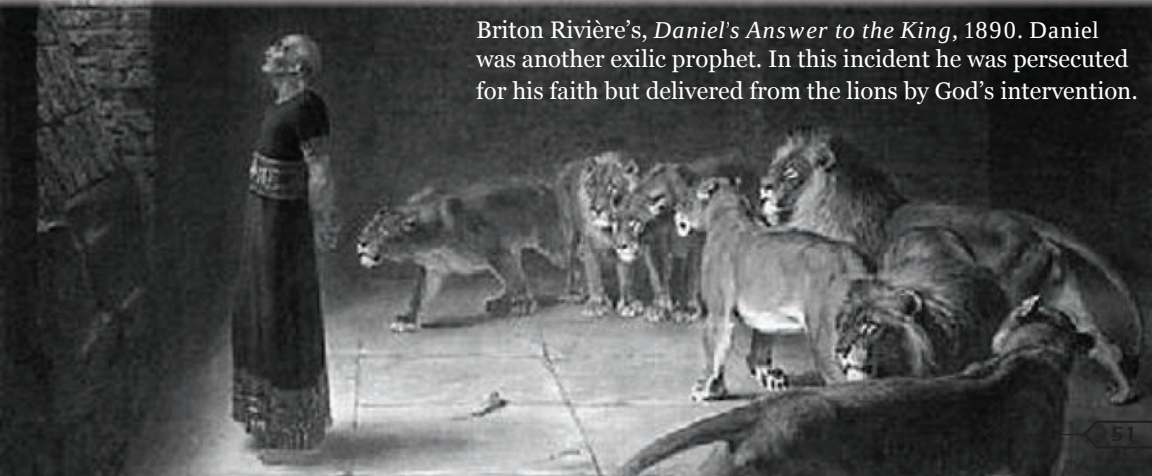
Apply it this Week:

- *To find courage to leave Babylon, Simon needed to recall the promises God had made to him in Scripture. Look up these passages, and write out the specific promise God makes to us in each:*
 - *Romans 8:28*
 - *Romans 8:38-39*
 - *1 Corinthians 10:13*
 - *Hebrews 13:5*
- *Circle one of the promise-passages above to memorize this week. Recite your passage to someone in your small group.*
- *Whom do you know that is struggling with hopelessness or despair right now? What is one specific way you can encourage them this week?*

Close in Prayer:

End your study by turning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned, and ask for His help to follow through on your application.

Briton Rivière's, *Daniel's Answer to the King*, 1890. Daniel was another exilic prophet. In this incident he was persecuted for his faith but delivered from the lions by God's intervention.





BONUS QUESTIONS

- Take a moment to fill out the Biblical Covenants chart on pages 90-91.

- What motivated God to give this covenant to His people? What does this motivation teach us about the character and concerns of God?

- What is the significance of the timing of these prophecies about the New Covenant? In other words, why is it significant that God chose to reveal this future covenant around 600 BC?

- How do you expect the promises of the New Covenant to relate to the church since these promises were originally granted to the nation of Israel and Judah? We will discuss this in a future lesson.





Jesus Revealed

Birth and Early Ministry of Christ



Study the History

PERSIA TO MESSIAH

Recap

In the previous lesson we studied the New Covenant, the final of God's four biblical covenants with Abraham's descendants, the Israelites. In this covenant, God promised to give His people both the desire and the ability required to fully obey Him so that, as a result, they could finally receive all of the promises made in the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants. Yet unlike the previous covenants, God did not immediately enact the New Covenant. Instead, He promised to one day send His Messiah (a Hebrew title meaning "Anointed One" and translated "Christ" in Greek) who would lead the Israelites back to God by instituting this covenant with them....

Messianic Prophecies

Toward the end of the Old Testament, God began to reveal detailed information about this Messiah. Some of the most significant Messianic prophecies are found in the books of Isaiah and Daniel.

What do you learn about God's Messiah from the following prophecies?

◀ **539 BC**

Persians
conquer
Babylon

◀ **331 BC**

Alexander the
Great conquers
Persia

◀ **323 BC**

Alexander
dies; Israel
passes to
Ptolemy

◀ **198 BC**

Seleucids take
Israel from
Ptolemies

◀ **167 BC**

Maccabean
revolt begins

◀ **143 BC**

Maccabean
revolt succeeds;
Jewish self-rule
begins

◀ **63 BC**

Romans
control Israel

◀ **37-4 BC**

Herod in
power

◀ **c.4 BC**

Jesus born

➤ *Isaiah 9:1-7*

➤ *Isaiah 52:13-53:12*

➤ *Daniel 7:13-14*

Prophetic Silence

The prophet Malachi wrote the final book of the Old Testament around 430 BC. After that, God sent no other prophet and revealed no other Scripture until John the Baptist, more than 400 years later!

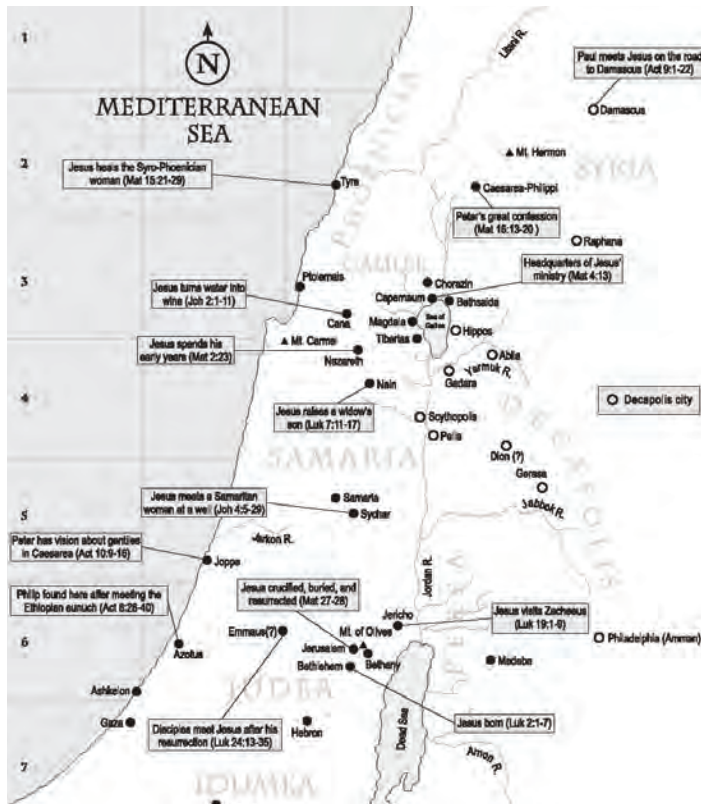


Between the Testaments

Despite the prophetic inactivity during the 400 years of silence, the nation of Israel experienced almost constant political and cultural upheaval. The Persian empire had already conquered the Babylonians by the time Malachi wrote. In turn, the Persians fell in 331 BC to the Greeks under Alexander the Great, who took control of Israel and spread Hellenism throughout the ancient world. Hellenism, the language, religion, and culture of Greece, greatly influenced Israel along with every other nation it touched. With Alexander the Great's death, the Greek Empire was divided into four kingdoms. The southernmost kingdom, based in Egypt and led by one of his generals, Ptolemy, claimed Israel, yet allowed substantial religious freedom for the Jewish people. However, intense rivalry between Ptolemy's descendents and the descendents of another general, Seleucus in Syria, brought numerous bloody battles to the land of Israel. The Seleucids eventually triumphed and were quick to limit religious freedom in Israel. They enforced Hellenism and even defiled the Jewish temple. This desecration motivated the Jews to band together and revolt under the leadership of a Jewish family named Maccabee. The Maccabees succeeded and established the Hasmonean kingdom, named after one of their ancestors. During the 80-year rule of this kingdom, the Jews enjoyed greater religious freedom and autonomy than they had at any point since their Babylonian captivity. Yet even in this period, Israel was subject to the whims of Gentile kingdoms and eventually fell to the newest such kingdom, the Romans. Jews remained under Roman rule when John the Baptist and Jesus Christ appeared on the scene.

Map of Israel in the Time of Christ with Key NT Events

a NET Bible map





Interpret the Big Events **THE INCARNATION**

During this lesson we will focus on the birth and early ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, God's Messiah. Remember from the second lesson of the *Essentials* packet that Jesus is the eternally existent Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity. Just over 2000 years ago, the Son of God assumed human flesh, being born a carpenter's son in the tiny town of Nazareth. In this event, known as Christ's "incarnation," Jesus, who was always fully God, also became fully human. He was like us in every way except that He never sinned. Thus He became the one and only human being to completely fulfill God's purpose for humanity: to represent God's kingdom on earth by reflecting God's glorious image (His love, holiness, goodness, etc.) to the world.

No event in all of human history can rival the significance of the incarnation. Because of its importance, God chose to reveal it in four parallel accounts, the four Gospels (the word "gospel" means "good news") written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each Gospel account focuses on unique aspects of Jesus' life and ministry. We'll utilize Matthew and Luke in particular as we answer the following questions designed to help us understand how Jesus and His forerunner, John the Baptist, relate to and fulfill the Old Testament covenants, the primary subject of our study.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

For the following questions relating to John the Baptist, read Matthew 3:1-17 and Luke 1:57-80.

1. What was John's mission on earth? In other words, what did God call him to be and to do? (Compare Malachi 4:4-6 with Luke 1:13-17.)

2. What message from God did John the Baptist deliver to the Israelites? According to this message, what did God expect His people to do? (See also Luke 3:10-14.)

JESUS, THE CHRIST

For the following questions related to Jesus, read Malachi 4, Matthew 1:1, Luke 1:30-33, 68-80.



3. According to biblical prophecy, what would be the mission or work that God's Messiah would accomplish?
Note that this mission has multiple parts.

4. What allusions to Old Testament biblical covenants do you observe in Christ's mission?

For the following questions related to Jesus' teaching, read Matthew 4:17, 23-25; 5:17-30; 10:1-8; and 11:28-30.

5. What was the content of the message that Jesus preached? How did this message relate to the message John the Baptist preached?

6. Who was this message for? Why was it not intended for people of all races?

7. Having looked at the teachings of both John and Jesus, what did they mean by the word "repent"? What did repentance require of a person?

8. How does Jesus' mission and message of repentance relate to the biblical covenants? In other words, does His message point the Israelites back to any of the four covenants? If so, in what ways?



Apply to your Life WALKING IN HOLINESS

Rick had come a long way in just a year's time. For most of his career as a PhD. student, he had cared far more about grades than about God. But at the insistence of his wife, he began to attend a men's Bible study and he was shocked to find that he enjoyed it. The fellowship with other Christian guys and time in God's Word became his favorite two hours each week.

But tonight was different. Tonight, his group had begun to study Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, a passage of Scripture that Rick was totally unfamiliar with. As they took turns reading, he felt the pain of conviction growing within him. He was comfortable giving God these two hours for Bible study each week, but this passage made it clear that God wanted a lot more of him than that. God wanted Rick's every action, every word, even every thought to be righteous. God cared not only about his outward behavior, but even about the attitudes he had towards other people. "How many times this week did I check out attractive girls? How many times did I think my co-worker was an idiot, or did I resent the higher pay of others in my lab group?"

Reflection:

The Sermon on the Mount provides one of the greatest examples of Jesus' supernatural ability to speak words that shock, convict, and motivate audiences from any era. Even though this sermon does not apply to church-age believers like us in the exact same way it did to Jesus' original audience (because we do not live under the Mosaic Covenant - see lesson 9), it still provides a convicting reminder of the extent and depth of God's holiness as well as the beauty of His mercy and compassion. He cares not only about our outward actions, but also about our motivations, our thoughts, and even our intentions! Fortunately, Jesus also promised to give us the strength we need to obey this high calling to holiness (John 15:4-5).

- ☛ *Skim over Jesus' teaching in this sermon found in Matthew 5:21-48. Which of Jesus' statements or commands most convicts you? Why?*

- ☛ *Why do you find it difficult to fully obey God in this particular area of your life?*



Apply it this Week:

- *Brainstorm: List out five or more steps you can take to better obey one or more of Jesus' commands found in this sermon.*

- *Make a plan: Choose one of the ideas above to apply this week. What exactly will you do differently in the next seven days to walk in greater holiness before God?*

- *Be accountable: Whom, other than the Lord, will you ask to help you follow through with this application?*

Close in Prayer:

End your study by turning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned, and ask for His help to follow through on your application.



Carl Bloch's *Sermon on the Mount*, c. 1890.



BONUS QUESTIONS

- Read Luke 4:16-21, and compare verses 18-19 to Isaiah 61:1-2. Why do you think Jesus stopped quoting Isaiah 61 in the middle of a sentence?

- What were the purposes of Christ's miracles? In other words, why did He use time that could have been spent teaching to perform miracles? (See Matthew 4:23-25; 9:2-8,32-36; 15:29-38.)

- Matthew chapters 5-7 record Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount." For what purposes did Jesus give this sermon? In other words, how does the sermon fit into His mission as the Messiah?



Cenni di Pepo Cimabue Crocifisso di Cimabue. c. 1270.



Jesus Rejected

Opposition Builds Towards Christ



Study the History

1ST CENTURY JEWISH POLITICS

Recap

In the previous lesson we studied the birth and early ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. After 400 years of prophetic silence, God raised up John the Baptist to call the Jews back to the Mosaic Law so that they would be spiritually prepared for the arrival of their coming Messiah. Into this state of national expectation, Jesus stepped forward and claimed to be their Messiah (their "Christ" as translated in Greek), their rightful king as He demonstrated by His authoritative teaching and powerful miracles. Both John and Jesus proclaimed the great news that the kingdom of God was at hand - the national kingdom promised by God to David in the Davidic Covenant was about to be reinstituted as the prophets had predicted! And therefore, as the Old Testament covenants demanded, the Israelites needed to recommit themselves to obey the Mosaic Law and submit themselves to Jesus, their rightful king.

Yet not all Israelites were excited to hear that God's Messiah and king had arrived. Those in power, the Sadducees and Pharisees, found this news troubling....

Jewish Religious Groups

Even though Israel remained under Roman rule during the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus, several Jewish religious groups exerted significant influence over the people. To understand the ministries of John and Jesus, we must have a clear understanding of the identity, beliefs, and values of these groups that so often shaped the opinions of the nation. Two specific groups, known as the Pharisees and the Sadducees, received the greatest attention and condemnation in the gospel accounts.

➤ **The Pharisees** originated prior to the Maccabean revolt as an opposition movement against the religious persecution and forced Hellenization practiced by the

◀ c. 4BC
Jesus born

◀ c. AD 8
12-year-old
Jesus visits
Jerusalem
and astounds
religious
scholars

◀ c. AD 29
John the Baptist
and Jesus both
begin their
ministries

◀ c. AD 33
Jesus
crucified and
resurrected

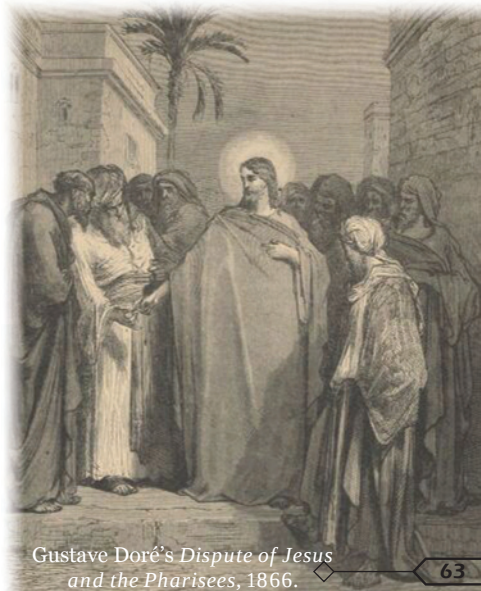


Seleucid rulers. They also opposed any Jews who chose to abandon the Mosaic Law. Doctrinally, they affirmed the authority of the entire Old Testament, the existence of angels, and a future resurrection. They were generally well educated, financially secure, and dutifully obedient to the outward practices of the Mosaic Law. Among their number were the “scribes,” who were professional copyists, interpreters, and teachers of the Law and who are sometimes referred to in the Gospels as “lawyers.” As political moderates, they possessed strong influence over the common people of Israel, whom they generally disdained as uneducated and spiritually unfit.

- ❖ **The Sadducees** likely originated from priestly families of the Maccabean era. As wealthy religious leaders with priestly descent, they lived like a religious aristocracy, wielding considerable political and religious power as granted to them by Roman authorities. Because of this alliance with the Romans, they were never able to muster the popular support enjoyed by the Pharisees, who were their bitter political enemies at the time of Christ. Doctrinally, they only affirmed the authority of the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament), and they denied the existence of angels and of a future resurrection and judgment.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were two of the main religious groups in Israel at the time of Christ. Others included Essenes, Zealots, and Herodians.

Based on the facts above, why might the Pharisees and Sadducees be opposed to the arrival of God's Messiah and king? (See also Matthew 7:28-29 and John 11:47-48.)



Gustave Doré's *Dispute of Jesus and the Pharisees*, 1866.



Interpret the Big Events FROM REJECTED TO RISEN

During this lesson we will focus on the later ministry and eventual crucifixion of Jesus Christ. While His ministry generated great popularity at first, especially among the common people, His growing influence threatened the power held by the Sadducees and Pharisees. These religious leaders rejected Jesus' claim to be their Messiah. Gradually they began to turn public opinion against Him. Eventually, the nation as a whole would follow their religious leaders in rejecting Jesus and condemning Him to death as a heretic and blasphemer. Even though Jesus had lived a morally perfect life as God's kingdom representative, His own kinsmen turned Him over to the cruelest of human punishments - Roman crucifixion. As discussed in *Essentials* lesson 3, during His crucifixion, Jesus took our sins, past, present, and future upon Himself and died as our substitute. He was, in fact, the perfect sacrifice, finally fulfilling once and for all the entire Old Testament sacrificial system that was detailed in the Mosaic Covenant. As John the Baptist predicted, Jesus proved to be "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." But thank God that the story didn't end there! Death did not have the final word, for just as Jesus had predicted many times before, God the Father vindicated His Son by raising Him from the dead three days later. By conquering sin and death, Jesus turned what appeared to be Satan's greatest victory into the ultimate source of his defeat.

Looking back at the course of Jesus' ministry, we see that the crucial turning point occurred when the religious leadership rejected Him, an event recorded most clearly in Matthew chapter 12. From that point on, the nature of Jesus' ministry changed as He began the long, unavoidable journey to the cross. Yet despite this change, Jesus still fulfilled the covenant ministry the Father had entrusted to Him, for in His death and resurrection all of the Old Testament covenants ultimately find their fulfillment.

1. Review your answer to question #3 last week regarding Jesus' mission on earth. What part of the Messiah's mission did Jesus choose to focus on during the early part of His ministry? (See Matthew 5:13-20; 11:29; and compare Luke 4:16-21 to Isaiah 61:1-2.)



For the following questions read Matthew 11:1-6.

2. Why did John the Baptist begin to doubt Jesus' identity? Hint: think about John's circumstances in Matthew 11 and the Messiah's overall mission as predicted in Malachi 4 and Isaiah 61:1-2.

3. What is Jesus saying in vv 4-6 in His response to John's question? What exactly is His answer to John?

For the following questions read Matthew 13:10-17,24-43.

4. How did Jesus' method of teaching change after Matthew 12? Why did Jesus make this change in method?

5. How does Jesus' concept of the "kingdom of heaven" as presented in Matthew 13 compare to the Davidic Covenant's concept of a kingdom?

For the following questions read Matthew 16:13-23.

6. At this point in His ministry, who did the disciples understand Jesus to be?

7. Why did Peter reject the idea that Jesus would die? Hint: What was Peter expecting the Messiah to do? Would this expectation be fulfilled if Jesus died?



8. What consequences for the nation of Israel did Jesus predict based upon their rejection of Him? (See Matthew 21:33-46; Luke 13:34-35; 19:41-44.)

9. What is the relationship of Jesus Christ and His death to the:

- promises of the Abrahamic Covenant? (See Galatians 3:8,13-14,16.)
- regulations of the Mosaic Covenant? (See Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:10-14; Hebrews 8:13.)
- promises of the Davidic Covenant? (See Luke 1:30-33; Acts 2:32-36.)
- promises of the New Covenant? (See Luke 22:20; Galatians 3:14; Hebrews 8:6.)

Apply to your Life DISAPPOINTMENT

My, how life changes fast! Just a few months ago he attracted crowds of thousands who held onto his every word. Few people in all of Israel commanded as much influence and respect as “John the Baptizer,” as they were fond of calling him. And yet now John languishes in a Roman prison. All he had ever done was obey God’s direction in his life, even when that meant publicly rebuking the sinning rulers of the nation. Shouldn’t that bring God’s honor and reward? Wasn’t that what the covenants promised? Prison. Suffering. Fear of death. That’s not what he had signed up for! Where was the kingdom of justice and peace that Jesus was prophesied to bring? Had he been mistaken about Jesus all along? Could he trust God’s promises even from this dark, dank cell?



Reflection:

- *List out two or more times in your life when you felt disappointed in your circumstances. Perhaps you were expecting God to do something or provide something for you, and He did not.*

- *In these instances, how did you handle your disappointment?*

- *What do you expect to be true of your life in the future? List out a few descriptions of the life you expect to have or desire to have five years from now.*

Apply it this Week:

- *Look back over your list of expectations carefully. Circle any that are founded on biblical promises (in other words, you can bank on them because God has promised them to you)? Of those that are not, are you willing and ready to give them up if God chooses not to bring them about? Why or why not?*

- *Spend time praying over your expectations for the future. Turn them each over to God, and ask Him to do as He knows best for your future. Remember, He promises to work all things for good for those who love Him (Romans 8:28) even if the results don't look "good" to us in this life!*



Digging Deeper

BONUS QUESTIONS

- Carefully read Matthew 12 to answer the following questions:
 - What is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?
 - Why is it considered an “unpardonable sin”?
 - In contrast, what is the “fruit” in 12:33?
- To whom did Christ announce that He would be rejected and crucified? To whom did He not announcement this? (See Matthew 16:21; 17:11-12; 20:18-19; 26:31-32.) Why is this significant?
- Look back at your answer to question 8. How do the consequences of Israel’s rejection of Jesus relate to the Old Testament covenants? In other words, do the Old Testament covenants create an expectation that Israel’s rejection of her Messiah would bring such devastating consequences? Why or why not?



Guido Reni's *Peter and Paul*, 1605.



Jesus Ascended

The Church Age



Study the History

THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

Recap

In the previous lesson we studied the second half of Jesus' ministry, a time of growing opposition that ended in His sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection. When the leaders of Israel rejected Jesus, their rightful Messiah and king, He began to prepare His followers for a new form of God's kingdom that would be very different than the Davidic kingdom they were expecting. Instead of ruling politically and militarily on earth, this new "mystery" form of the kingdom that Jesus called His "Church" would start small and grow invisibly and quietly in the hearts of men and women. Yet even though this form of the kingdom would be new and different, it would continue to advance God's desire to glorify Himself on earth through human representation. It would also find its power and strength through the biblical covenants that Christ's death fulfilled.

AD 33

- Death, resurrection & ascension of Jesus
- Birth of the Church on Pentecost

c. AD 34-35

- Martyrdom of Stephen
- Conversion of Paul

AD 46-48

- Paul's 1st Missionary Journey

AD 49

- Jerusalem Council

AD 49-51

- Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey

AD 52-57

- Paul's 3rd Missionary Journey

AD 60-62

- Paul's 1st imprisonment

c. AD 64-68

- Martyrdom of Peter and Paul

AD 70

- Destruction of Jerusalem

Ascension of Christ

The first chapter of Acts tells us that for forty days after His resurrection, Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples and followers and prepared them for life on earth in His absence. He told them to remain in Jerusalem until they were "baptized" by the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to send. After making this promise, Jesus visibly ascended into heaven where He even now sits enthroned in glory and power at the right hand of God the Father.

Pentecost

Shortly after Jesus' death in AD 33, on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the start of Passover, the era of the Church began. As Acts chapter 2 records, the Holy Spirit descended from heaven and indwelt the followers of Jesus gathered in Jerusalem. As an evidence of this new form of God's kingdom, the Spirit worked miracles through these believers, including giving them the ability to speak in foreign languages that they were unfamiliar with (the gift of "tongues"). Filled with the Spirit's power, Jesus'

Life of Christ

Church Age



disciples began to proclaim a new “gospel” - good news that Jesus had entrusted them to share with the whole world. As this message spread, thousands of Jews came to faith in Christ and joined the Church.

Conquering Old Barriers

As the events of Acts progressed, God began to break down barriers that had existed for thousands of years. After the Jews killed Stephen, a deacon in the Church who became its first martyr, many believers fled Jerusalem and traveled throughout Israel sharing the gospel. One of these believers, Philip, took the gospel to the Samaritans, a Jewish-Gentile mixed race whom most Jews abhorred. Yet through Philip, God drew many Samaritans into His Church and placed them on equal ground with their Jewish brothers in the faith. An even more radical extension of God’s kingdom occurred through Peter when, in Acts 10, he shared the gospel with the family of Cornelius, who was a Gentile, meaning one not racially Jewish. Not only was Cornelius saved, but he received the Holy Spirit’s power and miraculous gifts just as the Jewish believers had. From this humble beginning God began to bring thousands of Gentiles to faith first through Peter, and then through Paul, a Jewish Pharisee who was transformed by the gospel. Though Paul had been the Church’s primary persecutor, he became its foremost apostle to the Gentiles. Yet for many years, the early church struggled to understand how Gentiles and Jews might fit together in a single body. Shouldn’t Gentiles be required to obey the Mosaic Law just as Jews had for centuries? The debate reached a climax in Acts chapter 15 at the Jerusalem council, where the apostles unanimously determined that God graciously welcomed Gentiles into His Church without requiring them to act like Jews.

Judgment Cometh

Even as the gospel spread throughout the Roman world, God began to bring upon Jerusalem the fierce judgment that Jesus had promised in Luke 19:41-44. In AD 70, Roman armies entered Jerusalem and burned the temple and the city to the ground. They also killed or enslaved tens of thousands of Jews.



Francesco Trevisani’s *Peter Baptizing the Centurion Cornelius*, 1709.



Interpret the Big Events

THE CHURCH AGE BEGINS

During this lesson we will focus on the events recorded in the book of Acts, beginning with the ascension of Jesus Christ, the founding of the church at Pentecost, and the growth of the church through the ministry of Jesus' apostles.

1. Read Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:6-8. What mission does Christ give to His apostles? Compare and contrast this mission to the mission of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ.

2. Read Luke 24:45-49; Acts 15:5-11; 16:25-30; and 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. What gospel ("good news") message do the disciples preach after the resurrection of Jesus? Is this the same gospel that Jesus and John the Baptist proclaimed before Jesus' crucifixion? If not, what is different about it?

3. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 and Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:11-22; and 3:3-12 to answer these questions:

- ☛ What exactly is the church?

- ☛ How does a person become a part of the church?



- ☛ Did the church exist before the book of Acts?
How do you know?

- ☛ What purpose(s) does the church fulfill in God's plan?

4. How does the church relate to the laws of the Mosaic Covenant? Are church-age believers bound to the Mosaic Law? Why or why not? (See Romans 7:4-6; 10:4 and Acts 10:9-16; 15:1-11.)

5. What is the church's relationship to each of the covenants below? In other words, do church-age believers like us have access to any of the promises of the following covenants:

- ☛ Abrahamic Covenant? (See Genesis 12:3, Galatians 3:1-14, 16, 29.)
- ☛ Davidic Covenant? (See Matthew 1:1; 28:18; Luke 1:30-33.)
- ☛ New Covenant? (See Acts 2:1-4; Galatians 3:14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Hebrews 10:11-22.)



Apply to your Life

SUFFERING

The year is 155 AD, and Christianity has been officially outlawed by the Roman government. Those publicly accused of following Jesus must recant their faith and offer worship to the Roman emperor. Those who refuse are handed over to be crucified, burned, torn apart by wild animals, or, if they're lucky, beheaded.

As the frenzied crowd cries for his death, an elderly man named Polycarp, a bishop of the city of Smyrna, walks peacefully into the arena. The Roman proconsul pleads with him to curse Jesus and worship the emperor. Surely he is too old to stand the fires of execution! But Polycarp responds, "For eighty-six years I have served him, and he has done me no evil. How could I curse my king, who saved me?" To the shock of all in attendance, he willingly submits to his captors as they tie him to a pyre standing above stacks of wood. The fire is lit, and the elderly man is engulfed in smoke. But before the flames extinguish his life, he cries out to all who can hear, "Lord Sovereign God... I thank you that you have deemed me worthy of this moment, so that, jointly with your martyrs, I may have a share in the cup of Christ... For this... I bless and glorify you. Amen."

Reflection:

The reality of suffering is one of the great surprises of the church age. Though Jesus rose from the grave and has already received all authority in heaven and earth, His followers are more likely to experience persecution than honor in this life. Whether we realize it or not, we are unwanted strangers on this earth, outcasts living among societies that are opposed to our faith. And millions have even been required to follow the example of Jesus' apostles and Polycarp and to pay the ultimate price for our faithfulness to Christ. With our King no longer on earth, the reality of suffering remains normative in the Christian life.

- *Why does God allow us to suffer? Is there anything good that comes of it?*

- *Has your faith in Jesus ever cost you anything? If so, what?*



Apply it this Week:

On our better days, many of us would say that we are willing to die for Jesus. But are we willing to live for Him? Are we willing to make the daily sacrifices required to glorify Jesus in this fallen world?

- *If a stranger observed everything you do in a given day, would he or she come to the conclusion that your relationship with Jesus is the most important priority in your life? Why or why not?*

- *List out a few possible sacrifices you could make this week that would more clearly honor Jesus as the first in your life.*

example: I will sacrifice 30 minutes of sleep on Tuesday morning to spend quality time with the Lord in His Word.

Close in Prayer:

End your study by turning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned, and ask for His help to follow through on your application. Then spend a few minutes praying for your brothers and sisters in Christ in other countries who face prison or even death for their faith (e.g. Sudan, China, Indonesia).

Check out www.persecution.com as a great resources on the persecuted church.





Digging Deeper

BONUS QUESTIONS

- According to Ephesians 2:11-22, how has Christ's death affected the relationship between Jewish believers and Gentile believers? In other words, how is this relationship different today than it was during the Old Testament. According to Ephesians 3:3-12, was this change of relationship expected?

- What is the church's present experience of New Covenant blessings? Compare Jeremiah 31:34 and Ezekiel 36:25-27 to Ephesians 1:13-14, 2 Corinthians 1:22, and Romans 8:22-23. In other words, does the church's present experience of New Covenant blessings seem fully realized or only partially begun? What does this imply about the future?

- Are members of the church now considered fully Israelites or is there still a distinction today in God's eyes between "Israel" of the Old Testament and the "church" of today (see Romans 9:1-5)?

- If there is a distinction, then is there still an "Israel" today and who are they? How would a Jew who believes in Jesus be any different than a believing Gentile today?

- In what ways is the Church similar to the kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament? In what ways are these two forms of God's kingdom different?





Jesus Glorified

The Victorious Return of Christ



Study the History

THE CHURCH UNTIL TODAY

Ancient Church

Medieval Church

Modern Church
Enlightenment | Reformation

Postmodern Church

◀ AD 33

Birth of church at Pentecost

Recap

In the previous lesson we studied the mission and ministry of the early church as recorded in the New Testament. After Christ ascended to the Father's presence, His followers received the Holy Spirit and became witnesses of Christ's death and resurrection from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. As many Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles responded to this new gospel of forgiveness for sins through faith, they all became equal participants in the rapidly growing church. But such growth quickly brought opposition, first from Jewish authorities and later from the Roman government. Many of the apostles and leaders of the early church lost their lives for the faith. Yet the more who died for Christ, the more He grew His church so that, as the ancient writer Tertullian said, "The blood of the martyrs has become the seed of the church." The story of the church's growth doesn't stop with the New Testament. God has continued to work in powerful ways over the last 2000 years. We can divide all of the history of the church into four main periods . . .

◀ AD 313

Constantine makes Christianity legal

◀ c. AD 600

◀ AD 1054

Great Schism divides Catholic and Eastern Orthodox church

Ancient Church (AD 33 - AD 600)

◀ AD 1517

Luther posts his 95 Theses publicly

◀ c. AD 1700

◀ c. AD 1900

As the last of the apostles died and the church entered the early 2nd century, heightened Roman persecution and the rise of false teachers within the church led the church fathers, the direct disciples of the apostles, to centralize their authority over the doctrine of the church and to begin to identify a New Testament canon (or authoritative grouping) of the apostles' writings. Their successors, the apologists of the later 2nd and 3rd centuries provided us our first official lists of New Testament books. They also wrote our first extensive explanations of Christianity to defend the faith against the growing attacks of false teachers and Roman intellectuals. In AD 313, Emperor Constantine ended the persecution of Christianity and allowed church leaders to openly meet and resolve their theological disputes, leading to the creation of the historic church creeds of Nicea (AD 325) and Chalcedon (AD 451) that clarified



our understanding of the Trinity and the Person of Christ. A short time later, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire, leading to massive numerical growth but also increased secularization and hypocrisy.

Medieval Church (AD 600 - AD 1500)

With the Roman Empire's collapse in the 6th century, the church in Rome acted as a stabilizing force and assumed greater political and social power with each successive century, even crowning kings in the 9th century. The church in Rome also claimed religious authority over all other churches. Missions to pagan tribes grew during these years even as political and moral corruption spread through the leadership of the church. Centuries of tension over Rome's claim of dominance led to a permanent break in AD 1054 between the Western (Roman Catholic) Church and the Eastern (Orthodox) Church. Monasticism in the 12th century led to a fresh renewal that emphasized the spiritual disciplines. Yet in the latter Medieval period, the Roman Catholic Church deviated greatly from the teachings of the apostles, especially regarding justification by faith alone and the unique authority of Scripture. The period ended with 300 years of Crusades as the Western church launched military campaigns against the Muslim world that led to continual cycles of conflict.

Modern Church (AD 1500 - AD 1900)

As political corruption and spiritual decline engulfed the Roman Catholic Church at the end of the Medieval period, voices cried for reform. Over the next 200 years (AD 1500-1700), these voices would usher in a period of history called the Reformation that would see many groups break from the Roman Catholic Church. These groups became known as "Protestants" because they publicly declared their disagreement with Roman Catholic authority. The most historically significant Protestant movement began in Germany and was





led by Martin Luther who launched the Reformation with his rediscovery of justification by grace through faith alone and his renewal of confidence in God's Word as the sole authority for the life of the church. Shortly afterwards, Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin launched the Reformed church movement in Switzerland. Both the Lutheran and Reformed movements sought to reform not just the lax morals of the Medieval Catholic Church, but also the doctrine that had strayed so far from the apostles' teachings. A third group, the Anabaptists, desired to go even further and add political reform by calling for a complete break between government and church authority. The Anabaptists were so named because they uniquely baptized only believers. From this foundation the Baptist and Bible church movements would grow centuries later.

Even before the Protestant Reformation, reform began within portions of the Roman Catholic Church. Many desired to stamp out moral and political corruption while maintaining Roman Catholic doctrine. This reform gave the Catholic Church the renewed strength and uniformity it needed to battle Protestantism. Since church and state were inseparable for Roman Catholics and most Protestants, this battle was military in nature and became incredibly bloody. Even as the Renaissance brought a renewal of learning and art during the 16th and 17th Centuries, tens of thousands suffered horribly at the hands of those who used religion as an excuse for bloodshed.

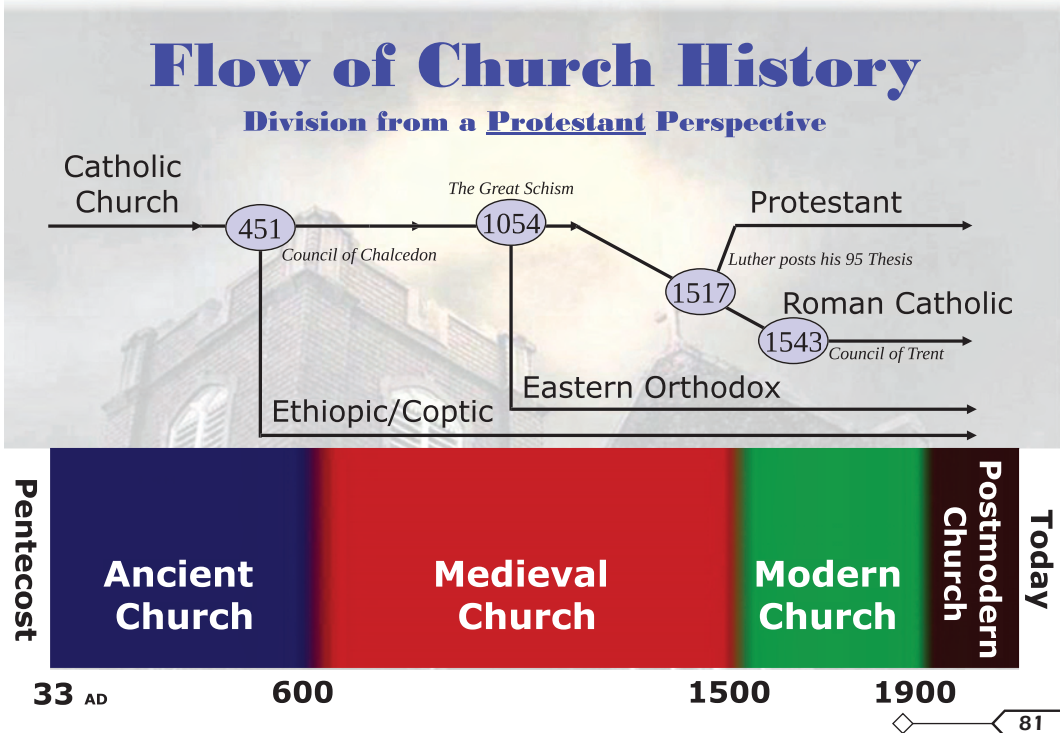
This incessant suffering led many to question the value of religion. They sought a new authority for life that all men could agree on, and so, turned to human reason. This exaltation of reason above both biblical revelation and human tradition birthed the Enlightenment (AD 1700-1900). Philosophers like René Descartes and Immanuel Kant undermined the authority of the Bible and brought into doubt historic beliefs in the deity of Jesus Christ and the depravity of human beings. Many believers chose to resist the Enlightenment's attacks, including the Pietists in Europe, the Methodists in England, and Jonathan Edwards in America. However, many other churches chose to embrace Enlightenment thought and reduce their religion to nothing more than morality and social action. This new movement, called Liberalism, captured most of America and Europe by the end of the 19th century.





Postmodern Church (AD 1900 - Present)

While science and technology had discovered cures for diseases and improved economic conditions, two world wars, a Holocaust, and a nuclear bomb all dampened people's optimism regarding the power and supremacy of human reason and led to rampant despair and materialism. As a result, Liberalism began to decline. In contrast, Fundamentalists, those who maintained the authority of the Bible, grew especially in America. In the last half century, Fundamentalism has given way to Evangelicalism, a movement that maintains the apostles' doctrine and also strives to engage an unbelieving culture with the gospel. This movement saw great success under men like Billy Graham as many new Evangelical denominations and seminaries began. Yet in the last few decades, an ideological shift has occurred in much of Europe and America which recognizes neither revelation, tradition, nor reason as authoritative. This shift, known as Postmodernism, exalts each person's individual experience as the chief authority of truth and guide in life. Therefore, truth and morality are relative for each person. In this vacuum of absolutes, the church of today seeks to engage a skeptical culture with God's Word in ways that value both truth and experience.

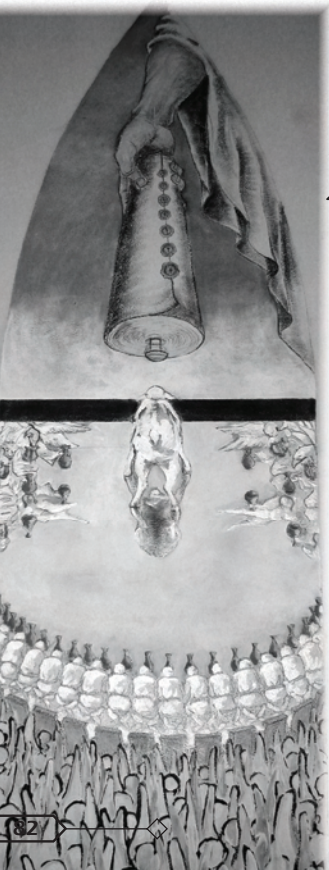




Interpret the Big Events THE RETURN OF CHRIST

During this lesson we will focus on the future return of Jesus Christ to the earth and the resulting climatic fulfillment of the four primary Old Testament covenants. With Christ's Second Coming, the sovereign rule of God in the heavens will finally extend throughout all of the earth over all human and even angelic authorities and powers. Jewish and Gentile believers alike will finally fulfill all that God intended for them as His earthly kingdom representatives.

1. As we studied last week, the church is now receiving many of the promises of the covenants. Does this imply that the church has replaced Israel as God's people, or does God still have a distinct plan for the Jewish nation? (See Acts 1:6-8; Romans 9:1-5; and 11:1-29.)



2. Based upon the biblical covenants we've studied, what basic events or changes must happen in the future for these covenants to be fulfilled? In other words, what promises from the Old Testament covenants are still yet to be fulfilled?



Daniel chapter 9, written about 539 BC, provides our best glimpse into God's plan for the nation of Israel in both the past and the future. Note that Daniel's "weeks" are actually references to groupings of seven years. So "seventy weeks" is actually a reference to $70 \times 7 = 490$ years. In verse 25, God's messenger mentions a decree to rebuild Jerusalem, which occurred historically on March 5, 444 BC. The verse goes on to say that after $7 + 62 = 69$ "weeks" = 483 years = March 30, 33 AD (using the Jewish calendar of 360 days per year), the Messiah would be "cut off." Just as Daniel had predicted, in March of 33 AD, Jesus Christ, the Messiah-King, was crucified. Use this amazing prophecy to answer the following questions.

3. The chapter begins with Daniel's prayer in verses 1-19. Read this prayer. What events in Israel's history is Daniel recounting to God? Exactly what request is Daniel making of the Lord?

4. Read God's answer in verses 20-27. What is God's purpose for these 70 "weeks" = 490 years? Who is this time period designed for and what will it accomplish?

5. While all of the events mentioned in the first 69 "weeks" have already occurred, the events of the 70th week have not. How do you explain this break between Daniel's 69th and 70th week? What caused this break? Hint: think back to what we have studied in the last two weeks.

6. According to v27, what exactly do we expect to occur during this future 70th "week" = 7 year period?



7. Our primary picture of the future comes from the book of Revelation. What do you learn about what God has in store from each of these passages from this last book of the New Testament?

☞ 5:6-10

☞ 19:11-21

☞ 20:1-15

☞ 21:1-8

8. Will believers face the Great White throne judgment described in Revelation 20:11-15? (See also John 5:24.)

9. What judgment will believers face? What is the basis of this judgment and what rewards can be gained or lost at it? (See Luke 19:11-27; 1 Corinthians 3:9-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 2:12; and Revelation 2:26-27.)

10. What will the new heavens and earth be like? (See Revelation 21:1-22:5; Romans 8:20-22; and 2 Peter 3:11-13.)





Apply to your Life LIVE IN LIGHT OF ETERNITY

Tom instantly notices two changes. First, deliciously relaxing heat infuses every recess of his conscious mind, replacing the cold stab of chronic pain that had been his constant companion for so many years. Second, the pale grey pallor of his hospital room gives way to unimaginably brilliant white light, light that would sear a retina in seconds, but light that Tom longed to never turn away from.

Despite the overwhelming beauty and warmth, it still takes him only moments to realize what has happened. "So cancer finally wins and I end up in a place like this?" Tom chuckles. Why had he ever feared death?

Yet even as this fear from his old life leaves him, a new fear takes its place as a figure emerges from the blinding light. A radiant man burning like molten metal approaches. Light, heat, energy, power, terror, all pour forth from his body and overwhelm Tom. There can be no doubt, this is Jesus, the Son of God. "This is He who died for me. This is my Lord," he realizes. And instantly the choices of his former life come back to mind: the lies he told, the people he hurt, the lusts he entertained, the selfishness he expressed, the opportunities to do good he passed by. How could he have sinned against a Lord such as this? If only he had realized the King he served! If only he had seen His all-consuming beauty. If only he had understood the awesome terror of this moment of judgment. If only...

Reflection:

Every one of us will eventually face this overwhelming moment when we stand before Jesus Christ our Lord for His judgment. It will not be a judgment that can lead to hell because we have been saved by God's grace through faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. This judgment before Jesus is not about getting into heaven (we'll already be there) but about receiving the praise and reward of our Master. It's based not on our faith but on our faithfulness in this life to serve Him. And it's so significant and so rightfully scary that it has motivated countless believers before us to flee from sin and sacrificially serve Jesus.

- ☛ *Do you live every day as if you may be standing before Jesus for judgment tonight? Why is this so difficult for us?*

- ☛ *What lies do Satan and this world use to distract us from the reality of this coming judgment?*



- *The reality of this coming judgment is certainly a cause for healthy fear, but it is also a cause for great hope and joy in this life. How does the fact that we will stand before Jesus for judgment and reward give us hope and joy for today?*

Apply it this Week:

- **Brainstorm:** *List out at least five specific things you could do this week to help you remember that you will one day stand before Jesus for judgment?*
e.g. I will memorize 2 Corinthians 5:10 this week and review it on a weekly basis.
- **Make a plan:** *Choose one of the ideas above to apply this week. What exactly will you do differently in the next seven days to help you more effectively live in light of eternity?*

Close in Prayer:

End your study by turning to the Lord in prayer. Thank Him for what you have learned, and ask for His help to follow through on your application.





Digging Deeper

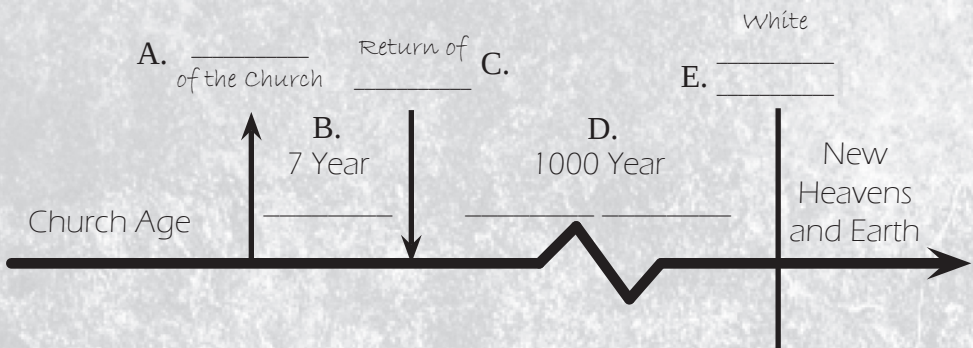
BONUS QUESTIONS

- Do you expect that the church will experience the Tribulation, also known as the 70th week of Daniel? (See 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9; and Revelation 3:10.) If not, how and when would they be removed from the Tribulation? (See 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.)

- When are believers resurrected for judgment and reward? (See 1 Corinthians 15:23.) When are non-believers resurrected and judged? (See Revelation 20:11-15.) What kinds of judgments do they experience? (See Matthew 11:22-24.)

- How do you reconcile passages such as Romans 11 that distinguish Israel from the church and passages such as Galatians 3:28-29 that seem to do just the opposite? Hint: study the surrounding context to see if Paul is speaking about identical or different topics in each passage.

Fill in this chart of future events:



(Hint: use the following verses: A. 1 Thessalonians 4:13; B. Daniel 9:27; C. Revelation 19:11-16; D. Revelations 20:4-6; E. Revelations 20:11-15.)



Appendix

1. Biblical Covenants Chart - pp. 90-91
2. Timeline of Biblical History - pp. 92-93

THE BIBLICAL COVENANTS

2090 BC

The _____ Covenant*

1446 BC

The _____ Covenant

Relation to AC: _____

977 BC

The _____ Covenant

Relation to AC: _____

Relation to MC: _____

580 BC

The _____ Covenant

Relation to AC: _____

Relation to MC: _____

Relation to DC: _____

***Covenant:** *A promise or binding agreement between two or more parties, similar to a contract. The four primary biblical covenants we are studying were given by God to a person or group of people. In each case, God sovereignly and “unilaterally” gave the covenant to whoever He chose (there was no bargaining or negotiation.) Ancient unilateral covenants came in two*

Fill in the details each week as you complete the lesson.

Verses: Gen 12:1-7; 13:14-18; 15; 17; 22:1-18; Rom 4; Gal 3

Parties: _____

Promises: _____, _____, _____

Nature: _____

What was Lacking: _____

Verses: Ex 20; 24; Deut 5; 28-30; Gal 3; 4:21-31

Parties: _____

Promises: _____

Nature: _____

What was Lacking: _____

Verses: 2 Sam 7:8-16; Ps 89

Parties: _____

Promises: _____

Nature: _____

What was Lacking: _____

Verses: Jer 31:31-40; Ezek 36:22-38; Lk 22:20;

Heb 8:6-13; 10:1-8

Parties: _____

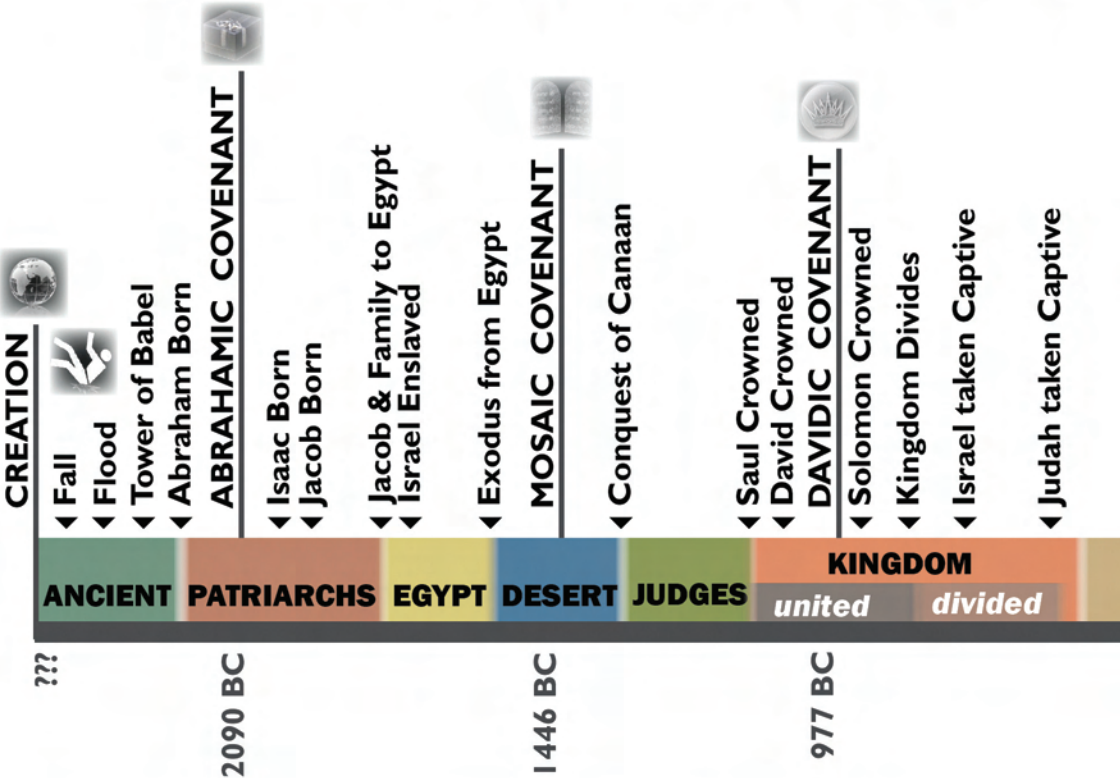
Promises: _____

Nature: _____

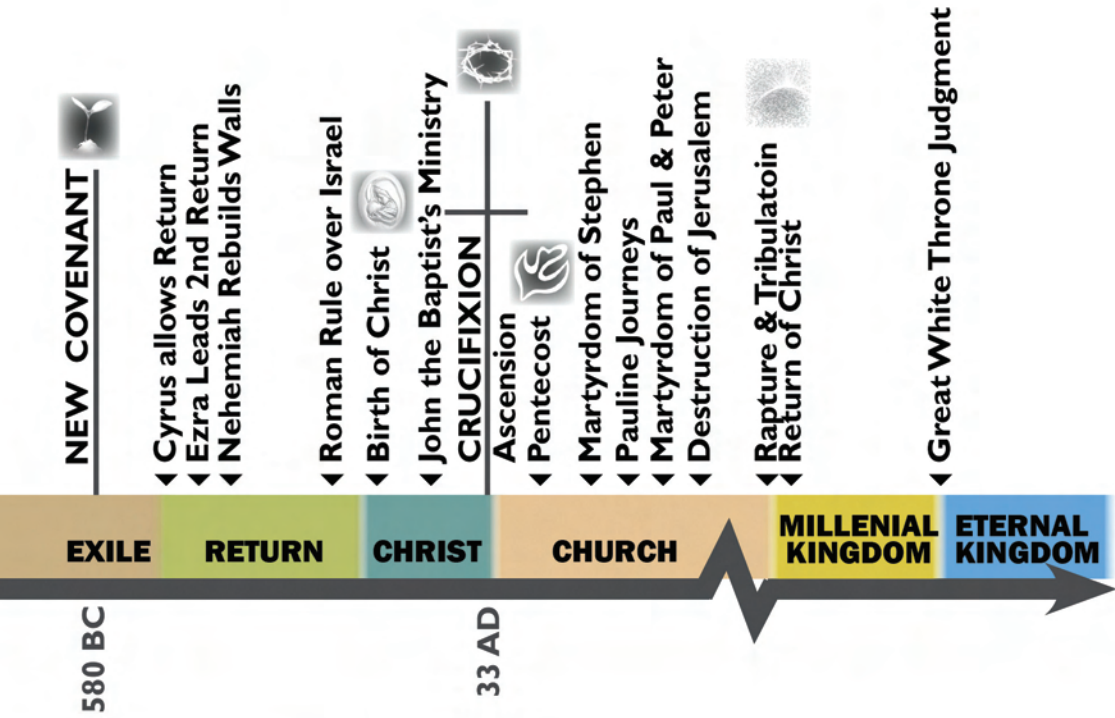
33 AD

forms: the “grant covenant” where a king gave land or power as a reward to a loyal subject, and the “suzerain-vassal covenant” where a subject vowed to obey a king and the king vowed to protect the subject if he obeyed and punish if he disobeyed.

TIMELINE OF BIBLICAL



HISTORY



Intertestamental Period

Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel
Ezra
Nehemiah
Haggai
Zechariah
Esther
Malachai

New Testament

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

Acts
Romans
1 & 2 Corinthians • Galatians
Ephesians • Philippians • Colossians
1 & 2 Thessalonians • 1 & 2 Timothy
Titus • Philemon • 1 & 2 Peter
1, 2, 3 John • Hebrews • James
Jude • Revelation

Buddha (India)
Confucius (China)
Persian Empire Begins

Alexandrian Empire
Ptolemies of Egypt
Seleucids of Syria
Roman Empire

Roman Colosseum Built

