

The Story Annotated

RVS Notes

**National Presbyterian Church
Adult Nurture
Fall-Spring, 2018-2019**

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Welcome

Welcome to this course. This class is part of a church-wide effort to help us better know and grow in God's Word. Through the Fall and into next Spring, we will be reading, studying, discussing, and digesting *The Story*. *The Story* contains selections of Scripture text placed in chronological order with short transitions to connect readers to the continuing biblical narrative. Its purpose is to help people get a sense of the "big picture" of the Bible. The narrative concentrates on God's love for us and his redemptive activity on our behalf throughout history. The authors suggest five movements to the unfolding of God's redemptive purpose:

- **Movement 1—*The Story of the Garden (Genesis 1-11)***—God creates the world and envisions being with humanity in it. This community with God is rejected by Adam and Eve, sin enters the created order, and the first couple is escorted from Paradise. God gives a promise and launches a plan to restore divine-human community.
- **Movement 2—*The Story of Israel (Genesis 12-Malachi)***—God chooses a people, Israel, through whom he will reveal his presence, power, and redemptive plan.
- **Movement 3—*The Story of Jesus (Matthew-John)***—Jesus enters our world to be with us and to provide a way for us to be rightly related to God. Through faith in him and his work on the cross, sin's curse in Adam's original choice can be rolled back and we can be rightly related to God.
- **Movement 4—*The Story of the Church (Acts-Jude)***—Those in right relation to God through faith in Jesus Christ belong to a new community called the church. The church is commissioned to be the presence of Christ in this world sharing the good news of redemption in Christ by the way we speak and live.
- **Movement 5—*The Story of the New Garden (Revelation)***—God will one day create a new earth and once again come to be with us.

Throughout the narrative, we will meet people very much like us from different times, places, and cultures. We will see them wrestle with situations with which we can identify. And we will witness a God who is there, who loves deeply, and who acts personally in space and time to transform the situation in which we find ourselves. We will see this redemptive activity culminate in the life, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ. A day will come when God recreates this fallen world and restores the creation to its original intent. Jesus will rule righteously—every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord. Meanwhile, we are to learn to live by faith, to stay in step with God's Spirit, and to "reverse the curse" in our locales as God leads us.

Taking This Class

This class will be a mixture of video clips, discussion, and lecture. Your experience will be enhanced by reading the assigned portions of *The Story* each week. The Church will supply you a copy of *The Story* text without charge. In addition, a *Participant's Guide* will be available through our bookstore and/or online. The Guide provides overviews of the DVD video clips we will be using to introduce each session as well as discussion guides to enrich our interaction over the material.

The *RVS Notes* seek to further enhance the material of the class. Notes for each session are organized along the following lines:

- Materials assigned in *The Story* and the *Participant's Guide*
- Biblical texts covered by the session
- Session overview
- Bible episode summaries
- Discussion questions in *The Story* and in the *Participant's Guide* which will guide our interaction over the material
- Additional charts, notes, and observations
- Takeaways to spur application of the material
- Texts to bookmark

Appendices are supplied to provide additional context for your study. Appendix A contains Old Testament segment introductions and book charts and Appendix B contains similar material for the New Testament. A Table of Contents can be found at the beginning of each appendix.

The class will begin in September and will continue for 31 sessions. We will meet from September 9 to November 25 before breaking for the entire month of December. We will resume on January 6 and meet through June 2 with three breaks:

- Palm Sunday (4/14/19)
- Easter Sunday (4/21/19)
- Youth Sunday on Mother's Day (5/12/19).

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Session 1—Creation: The Beginning of Life as We Know It

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 1-12
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 13-18

Biblical text:

- Gen. 1-4, 6-9

Session overview—Chapter 1 focuses on central narrative of the early chapters of Genesis—the creation, the fall, and the flood. They reveal why the world we know is the way it is. Creation is not a product of random chance where the law of the jungle—survival of the fittest—reigns supreme. It is an eminently good realm that humanity created in God's image was to cultivate. The fall of humanity occasioned by Adam and Eve's disobedience to God's will affects everything. Rebellion brings a series of curses which takes God's good blessings and twists them into heartache. Work becomes toilsome, marriage full of selfish conflict, and childbirth a painful ordeal. The stunning beauty and lingering goodness of the created order and the heart-breaking tragedy of its current operation are explained. The narrative helps us understand why something so good has gone so wrong. The universal implications of disobedience are brought out, causing us to reflect on our own choices. In the flood story, we see God taking action to prevent the spread of human rebellion and sin in an act of both judgment and salvation.

Genesis introduces the essential human situation, providing a foundational understanding of the issues humanity faces. Some key points include:

- God is creator and initiator, both distinct from and intimately involved with all he has made.
- Nature is not a collection of random, meaningless matter in motion, but a carefully crafted work and revelation of God.
- Humanity is the crown of creation, created in the image of God, and with a unique role and responsibility in the created order.
- Humanity's rebellion against God impacts everything—both humanity and the created order.
- God wants a relationship with us and plans to redeem his fallen creation.
- The flood forecasts the reality of God's judgment, including his future and final judgment.

Bible episode summaries:

- **Creation (Gen. 1-2)**—This segment entails a description of the Creator and the days of creation (1:1-2:3) followed by a description of Adam and Eve in the garden and the institution of marriage (2:4-25). The Genesis account is unique among ancient accounts of the beginning of the earth both in its portrayal of God and of the world He created. Yahweh is a God of absolute power and moral purity. He is the self-existent one, prior to the created order, who calls creation into existence out of nothing. He fashions the world in a purposeful, orderly way as part of a master plan. The creation account differs from its modern counterpart as well. It teaches that God, not matter, is eternal; that creation is intelligently designed, not the product of random chance over time; that humanity is creation's pinnacle, bearing the image of the Maker, not the kingpin of the survival game because of the happenstance of a larger cerebral cortex.
- **Fall (Gen. 3-4)**—This segment describes the fall of humanity, including the original temptation and disobedience (3:1-7), the judgment and verdict of God (3:8-20), and the exile from the original pristine environment (3:21-24). Life in exile plays out in the story of Cain and Abel (4:1-7) and Cain's subsequent punishment and protection (4:8-24). Yet there is still blessing on the line of Seth (4:25-26). God's redemptive purpose provides hope in the midst of the downward spiral. This passage answers fundamental questions. What is wrong with the world? What is wrong with us? Sin and evil enters this earthly realm by deliberate human choice in an act of pride, rebellion, and unbelief. The story of the fall tells us why things are the way they are. While the entrance of sin into the world did not entirely destroy the goodness of creation, it taints and twists every aspect of that creation, including humanity. We are fallen creatures yearning for something better who live in a fallen world groaning for redemption.
- **Flood (Gen. 6-9)**—This segment details the state of humanity in those early days (6:1-4), God's decision to judge the situation (6:5-12) and rescue Noah out of it (6:13-22), the description of an incredible deluge (7:1-24), its abatement and Noah's exit from the ark (8:1-19), and Noah's building an altar to worship and the Lord's covenant with Noah (8:20-9:17). Note how, from the very outset, sin is not a static, but a progressive reality. One can see its progress in the first family in Genesis 3 and 4, in the antediluvian peoples in Genesis 6, in the first post-Flood family in Genesis 9, in sin's rapid spread and savage pride in the postdiluvian earth as recorded in Genesis 11, and in numerous episodes in the patriarchal families in the rest of the book.

Discussion Questions:

- *The Story*, p. 473
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 15-17

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *Genesis summary chart:*

Primeval History				Patriarchal History			
Creation 1:1	Fall 3:1	Flood 6:1	Dispersion 10:1	Abraham 11:10	Isaac 25:19	Jacob 27:1	Joseph 37:2
Human Race				Hebrew Race			
Mesopotamia				Canaan			Egypt

Key ideas: Origin of human condition; Covenant promise

Key verses: 3:15; 12:1-3

Key chapter: 15

- **Historical reliability of account**—There are three schools of thought on the historical reliability of Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch. First, the traditional approach assumes the supernatural origin of the text and the complete historical accuracy of the biblical record. Second, the historical-archaeological approach presumes that the biblical record is essentially reliable. The Pentateuch preserves historical traditions rather than creates them, but its purpose is fundamentally theological, not historical. Archaeological data serves as an objective control to biblical historical accounts. Third, a vantage point often described as historical reconstruction takes a very skeptical view towards the biblical narrative. Other ancient extra-biblical sources are considered more reliable than the Old Testament narrative. Historical critical scholars use a host of methodologies to reconstruct biblical history.
- **Creation** theories abound. The following chart summarizes some of the more popular ones:

<i>Theory</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Time issues</i>	<i>Treatment of “day”</i>	<i>Major issues</i>
Literal creation account	Views Gen. 1 as sequential & literal	Most adherents are young earth advocates	Day=24 hours	Reconciling with scientific evidence; Integrating Gen. 1 & 2
Evolutionary creation	Views creation as occurring over six eras	Unlimited time available for each era	Day=age	Sequence doesn’t line up with scientific data; Day=age a difficult reach

Literary view of origins	Seven day sequence is a literary construction	Narrative really has nothing to say about time	Oriented toward Sabbath theology	Ex. 20:11; Has nothing to do with time?
Prior creation	Record suggests a previous created world prior to Gen. 1	Most scientific ages related to prior creation	Day=24 hours	No textual support; Continuity in the geological record
Two-phased creation	Two distinct phases are recorded in Gen. 1 & 2	Gap between Gen. 2:3 and 4 accommodates any amounts of time	Any view of “day” is possible	People in Gen. 1 are not Adam and Eve and are not morally responsible

- **Fall**—Christian commentators have treated the fall as an historical event and not just some literary device to describe the human condition. Paul’s juxtaposition of “one man” Adam with Christ (Rom. 5:12, 15-19; 1 Cor. 15:20-22) assumes an historical backdrop to the fall as does his face-value acceptance of the reality of the tempter and the ensuing temptation (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14). The account describes Adam and Eve as endowed with intellect, emotion, and will. Though they are inclined toward God, they are free to either obey or disobey. In this probationary period, Adam acted not only for himself but for the whole race. The tree seems to stand for a sheer test of obedience. Would Adam submit to the will of God or assert his own will? The tree’s attraction has been likened to the various allurements of the world (1 Jn. 2:16): material—the lust of the flesh, aesthetic—the lust of the eyes, and intellectual—the boastful pride of life. The serpent may be a figurative description for Satan himself or a real creature that became an instrument of the evil one’s dark workings.
- **Flood**—Noah’s deluge is a genuine historical event of catastrophic proportions, involving heavy rain, and perhaps tidal waves and eruptions of underground springs. Many ancient cultures have preserved the traditions of a devastating flood that exterminated life over a wide area. The extent of the flood has aroused much debate. Advocates have found supporting arguments in the flood account for both a universal flood and a more localized (albeit widespread) deluge.

Takeaways:

- **Participant’s Guide**, p. 18.
- **From Creation**—Where we come from matters, and more than as a point of information. The creation narrative originally stood as an alternative to the polytheistic myths of the

ancient world. Now, it stands as an alternative to a materialistic, evolutionary theory. If we are a grand accident, then what does that tell us about how we should live and conduct ourselves? Do we really just make up the rules as we go? On the other hand, if we are the summit of a conscious creative process of a good and all-powerful creator, then we are accountable to him and he stands as the arbiter of right and wrong.

- ***From the Fall***—Sin changes everything. The fall's sad results unfold in Genesis 3. Immediately upon their transgression, Adam and Eve experience personal guilt, start hiding from God, casting blame on others, and are destined for physical death. They are driven from their blessed, pristine environment, The image of God within them survives but loses its soundness. Their will is no longer able to freely choose God (Jn. 8:34). They and their human descendants are spiritually blind (1 Cor. 2:14) and spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1, 5). Once able not to sin, they are now not able not to sin (Jer. 13:23). The fall involves judgment of both Satan and his instrument (Gen. 3:14-15), has ongoing consequence for women in procreation (Gen. 3:16), and on humankind's existence in the world God created (Gen. 3:17-19). The fall reaches all creation in that the entire material universe languishes in dysfunction (Rom. 8:20-22).
- ***From the Flood judgment***—God takes action to prevent the spread of human rebellion and sin. The flood is both an act of judgment and of redemptive mercy. It is something of a paradigm of God's sovereign judgments throughout Scripture.

Text to bookmark: Gen. 1:26-27

Session 2—God Builds a Nation

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 13-27
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 19-24

Biblical texts:

- Gen. 12-13, 15-17, 21-22, 32-33, 35
- Rom. 4
- Heb. 11

Session overview— Chapter 2 records God's determination to build a nation that would bless all nations. The choice of Abraham and the patriarchs to spearhead this effort reveals that it's God's grace, not human effort, which matters most in this story. God calls Abraham and begins working through a covenant relationship, making Abraham and his descendants his chosen people, marking out a place for them to be, and promising to bless all humanity through them. God keeps his promise to Abraham of a lineal descendant through Sarah (Isaac), after an episode where Abraham and Sarah attempt to make God's plan work through their own efforts (Ishmael through Hagar). Abraham's legacy will descend through Isaac. One generation later, Isaac's son Jacob will have twelve sons of his own which establishes the tribal configuration of the nation of Israel.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Abraham's call (Gen. 12-13, 15; Rom. 4; Heb. 11)***—This segment describes or alludes to the call of Abraham (12:1-9), his first sojourn in Egypt (12:11-13:4), the first Lot narrative (13:5-18), and God's covenant with Abraham (15:1-21). The passages in Romans 4 and Hebrews 11 recall Abraham's faithful response to God. Abraham's decision to look to one God to supply all his needs was a radically countercultural move in the polytheistic culture of the day.
- ***Abraham takes things into his own hands (Gen. 16)***—This chapter narrates Abraham's union with Hagar and the birth of Ishmael. The ancient world placed enormous emphasis on producing offspring to safeguard family inheritance. Sarah's suggestion, placing her slave (Hagar) in the arms of her husband, while offending modern sensibilities, was the norm for her day. However, in the light of God's promise in Genesis 15, it did reveal a lack of faith in both Sarah and Abraham.
- ***Covenant of circumcision (Gen. 17)***—In this chapter, God reiterates his covenant with Abraham and commands the practice of circumcision as a sign of his people's fidelity. Circumcision was a common practice in the ancient world, according to the authors. What made the covenant of circumcision unique for Abraham was that God required it of him. Circumcision was to serve as a reminder that Abraham and his descendants were

called out and blessed to be a special covenant people of God. God promised blessing but also required faithful obedience.

- **Promise fulfilled (Gen. 21)**—This chapter describes the unlikely conception and birth of Isaac. Abraham’s heir does indeed come through Sarah; God works in the face of imperfect faith. Sarah’s faith is a roller coaster like so many of us. One year earlier she laughed at the very idea of having a child, only to laugh with delight at God’s gracious provision. Yet, the author of Hebrews indicates that she was enabled to bear children by faith (see Heb. 11:11).
- **Testing (Gen. 22)**—This chapter records the episode of Abraham and Isaac on Mt. Moriah. While Abraham’s faith could waver, this episode reveals that his confidence that God would be true to his word was persistent as well as his willingness to obey God’s commands. Hebrews tells us that Abraham obeyed God’s command to sacrifice his son Isaac because he had confidence that God could/would raise him from the dead.
- **Israel established (Gen. 32-33, 35)**—This segment records Jacob’s return to Palestine after working for Laban for Leah and Rachel and siring 12 sons. Fearful that Esau would take his revenge for being cheated of his blessing, Jacob was surprised by Esau’s seemingly affectionate reception of him (Gen. 32-33). Genesis 35 describes a mini-revival in Jacob’s household after his sons took revenge on Shechem for the rape of Jacob’s daughter. God’s choices continue to seem strange, especially with the choice of Jacob. Jacob seemed always about his own advantage, yet God pursues him, moves him to some point of faith, and builds a nation through him.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, pp. 473-474
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 21-23

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *Genesis summary chart:*

Primeval History				Patriarchal History			
Creation 1:1	Fall 3:1	Flood 6:1	Dispersion 10:1	Abraham 11:10	Isaac 25:19	Jacob 27:1	Joseph 37:2
Human Race				Hebrew Race			
Mesopotamia				Canaan		Egypt	

Key ideas: Origins; Covenant promise

Key verses: 3:15; 12:1-3

Key chapter: 15

- ***Abrahamic covenant***—The central theme of the Pentateuch is the fulfillment of God’s covenantal promises to the patriarchs. Covenant ideas reached all of life in patriarchal times. It was in covenant terms that God spoke to the people concerning their relationship with him. Central to all these is the Abrahamic covenant, initiated in Genesis 12:1-3. In that covenant, God promises four things to Abraham: (1) a place – he would be given a land; (2) a people – he would become a great nation; (3) a presence – he would enjoy a special covenantal relationship with God; and (4) a posterity of spirit – through him all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. The Abrahamic covenant is ceremonially cut in Genesis 15, renewed in Genesis 17 with circumcision given as a sign for the covenant, and confirmed in Genesis 22 in light of Abraham’s obedience on Mt. Moriah. God renews the promises to Abraham’s descendants (Gen. 26:2-5, 24; 28:13-15; 35:11-13; 46:2-4).
- ***Other covenants***— The Pentateuch makes mention a number of covenants – the so-called Adamic covenant (assumed as the backdrop to Gen 3:15 and relating to God’s promise of redemption through the seed of the woman), Noahic covenant (Gen. 9:1-17), the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 19-24), and some see a Palestinian covenant (Deut. 28-30). The Abrahamic and subsequent covenants would flesh out how that redemption would come. The Noahic covenant (Gen. 9) relates to God’s promise to defer the full judgment of sin because his redemptive purpose (fleshed out in the Abrahamic and subsequent covenants) takes precedence over immediate judgment. The later covenants expand upon the promises of the Abrahamic covenant. The promise of a land is elaborated on in the Palestinian covenant (Deut. 28-30). The Davidic covenant promises a kingly rule as an aspect of God’s presence with his people (2 Sam 7:12-16). The Mosaic covenant and the New covenant (Jer 31:31-40) deal with the requirements of living in the presence of a holy God.
- ***Election***—One is struck with God’s elective choice in the very first book of the Bible: Abraham and his seed from among world, Isaac instead of Ishmael, Jacob instead of Esau, Joseph instead of his brothers, and Ephraim instead of Manasseh. God’s relations with his covenant people involved both promise and responsibility. Obedience would lead to a great posterity for Abraham and would result in that posterity’s possession of the Promised Land. Disobedience would bring with it the curse – the lack of national cohesion, prosperity, and peace – and finally, disinheritance. The choice is put to them in stark terms!
- ***Monotheism***—Genesis declares that there is one God of absolute power and holiness over against the common polytheistic worldview that posited many gods and goddesses of varying, finite power and wisdom. Rejecting the ancient view that humanity was created as an afterthought which the gods regretted and sadistically toyed with, Genesis affirms that humanity was the summit of creation and that the race’s welfare is God’s deep and abiding concern. We have no stories of how the gods plotted, fought, lusted, and cruelly deceived humanity. We have no intrigue as petty potentates plot to extend their earthly fiefdoms or to get even with their rivals, regardless of the consequence to helpless humanity. God is high and holy, all-powerful and compassionate, just and

kind. In the Genesis account, there is one God, the sovereign Creator, to whom all the universe owes its being and its allegiance.

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p. 24
- What sin changes, faith overcomes.
- God's initiating grace (our fallenness requires this).
- Personal faith response—believing and obeying God as he reveals himself and his plan.
- Covenant as relating the parameters of relationship.

Texts to bookmark: Gen. 12:1-3, 15:6

Session 3—Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 29-42
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 25-30

Biblical text:

- Gen. 37, 39, 41-48, 50

Session overview—Chapter 3 captures God's fidelity to his covenant promises, again in story form. In the life of Joseph, we see the lengths God will go to keep his promises. We also see God's providential care for individuals. Joseph's brothers intended their actions for evil purposes, but God brought good out of it both for Joseph and for the entire nation.

Bible episode summaries:

- **Family troubles (Gen. 37)**—This chapter records the sorry results of both polygamy and family jealousies.. The Old Testament patriarchs were not faithful to God's original monogamous purposes for marriage, causing any number of family difficulties. Joseph foolishly relates dreams that foretold his exaltation (37:1-11) and Jacob's favoritism of Joseph augmented a growing jealousy among his older half-brothers. This results in Joseph's sale as a slave to wandering Bedouins who take him to Egypt (37:12-36),
- **To Egypt (Gen. 37, 39)**— For close to three millennia, Egypt was a power with which to reckon in the Near East. In this segment, the Bedouin captors of Joseph travel on to Egypt where Joseph is sold to an Egyptian official in whose house he initially prospers until falsely accused by the official's wife. Joseph's fortunes again take a sudden nosedive and he ends up imprisoned.
- **True Dreams (Gen. 41)**—Dreams were taken seriously by all ancient peoples. Throughout Scripture, God used dreams to guide people. In this chapter, Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams and is raised out of a jail cell to the position of vizier of Egypt.
- **Dream Fulfilled (Gen. 42-48, 50)**—This segment records how Joseph's dreams as a youth are ironically fulfilled by helping others (Pharaoh's officials and Pharaoh himself) interpret their dreams. Famine forces Joseph's brothers to go to Egypt where Joseph's true identity is eventually revealed to them (Gen. 42-45), Jacob and his household move to Goshen at the invitation of Pharaoh (Gen. 46-47), and the author relates Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (Gen. 48). The final chapter of this segment (Gen. 50) records Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers and his death. This capstone of the Joseph narrative illustrates how understanding that God is sovereign in the affairs of people helps us forgive others who wrong us.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 474
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 27-29

Additional charts, notes, and observation:

- *Genesis summary chart:*

Primeval History				Patriarchal History			
Creation 1:1	Fall 3:1	Flood 6:1	Dispersion 10:1	Abraham 11:10	Isaac 25:19	Jacob 27:1	Joseph 37:2
Human Race				Hebrew Race			
Mesopotamia				Canaan		Egypt	

Key ideas: Origins; Covenant promise

Key verses: 3:15; 12:1-3

Key chapter: 15

Takeaways:

- *Participant’s Guide*, p. 30
- Though people fail, God’s plan prevails.
- God’s providential care (Gen. 50:19-20; Rom. 8:28). The doctrine of providence informs us that the world and our lives are not ruled by chance or fate but by God.
- Waiting on God. Joseph waited a long time in harsh and dangerous situations. Are you waiting on God through difficult circumstances?
- Belief in God’s sovereign rule as empowering human forgiveness.

Texts to bookmark: Gen. 50:19-20

Session 4—Deliverance

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 43-57
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 31-36

Biblical text:

- Ex. 1-7, 10-17

Session overview—Chapter 4 records God’s great redemptive act of the Old Testament. Israel’s cultic calendar memorialized God’s deliverance of his people from the clutches of the preeminent world power of the day. In this story of deliverance, God reveals himself as the mover of empires with authority over the kings of the earth.

Bible episode summaries:

- **Pharaoh who forgot (Ex. 1-2)**—These chapters record the oppression of Israel in Egypt and the early career of Moses. It is difficult to establish an exact historical timeline for the Exodus. Two main scenarios are described in the Chronologies note below. However, it is clear that Egypt had emerged from the domination of the invading Hyksos who had ruled Lower Egypt for a hundred years. Indeed, that experience may be the explanation of their suspicion and oppression of Israel.
- **God in the wasteland (Ex. 3-4)**—God reveals himself to the fugitive Moses in a burning bush and commissions him to deliver Israel. In the encounter, He reveals his covenant name—YHWH, a name somehow related to the verb “to be”. God clearly wants his people to know who he is. Exodus 4 is a catalog list of excuses Moses used trying to avoid his divine assignment.
- **Confrontation (Ex. 5-11)**—Moses confronts Pharaoh with God’s command to let the Israelites go. The plagues on Egypt (Ex. 7-11) must have had an incredible faith-shaking effect on that empire. The judgments not only punished Pharaoh for his obstinate disobedience, but also illustrated Yahweh’s power over the gods of Egypt:

<i>Plague</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Egyptian gods</i>
Nile turned to blood	Ex. 7:14-25	Hapi & Isis—god and goddess of the Nile; Osiris—Nile as his bloodstream
Frogs	Ex. 8:1-15	Haget—goddess with a frog’s head
Gnats	Ex. 8:16-19	Set—god of the desert
Flies	Ex. 8:20-32	Re—sun god; Uatchit—god possibly represented by a fly
Death of livestock	Ex. 9:1-7	Hathor—goddess with a cow’s head;
Boils	Ex 9:8-12	Sekhmet—goddess of disease; Sunu—pestilence god; Imhotep—god of medicine

Hail	Ex. 9:13-35	Nut—sky goddess; Set—god of storms
Locusts	Ex. 10:1-20	Osiris—god of crops and fertility
Darkness	Ex. 10:21-29	Re—sun god; Horus—sun god
Death of firstborn	Ex. 11:1-12:36	Min—god of reproduction; Isis—goddess protecting children; Pharaoh’s firstborn—considered a god

- **Deliverance from danger (Ex. 12-17)**—The story of the Passover and the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt lies at the heart of the Old Testament narrative (Ex. 12-15). The events of that night are memorialized by annual celebrations the people commanded to ritually observe. It is a story of redemption and deliverance that lays the foundation for an even greater story of redemption and deliverance through the sacrifice of God’s own Son on the cross of Calvary. Even in the backdrop of such a great deliverance and miraculous provision in the desert, the people began their grumbling almost immediately (Ex. 16-17).

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, pp. 474-475
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 33-35

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- **Exodus summary chart:**

Deliverance					Mosaic Covenant				Tabernacle Construction		
From Egypt		To Sinai			19	20	21-23	24	Plan		Response
1	7	12	15	16					25	27	30
Slaves	Plagues	Exodus	Sinai		Commands	Laws	Affirm		Specs; Priests; Instructions	Gold calf	Build
From Subjection to Redemption					Revelation				Response		

Key idea: Redemption/deliverance

Key verses: 3:14; 6:6; 19:5, 6

Key chapters: 12-14

- **Passover and Exodus**—This is the great redemptive act of God in the Old Testament. Later generations looked back on this event with thankfulness. The prophets often invoked it to exhort the people to live as they ought. God’s miraculous intervention on behalf of his oppressed people demonstrated his mercy and sovereignty as nothing else in their history. The New Testament writers understood the Old Testament Passover

typologically as a precursor of Jesus’ sacrificial death as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7).

- **Chronologies**—Below is a graphic summary of various positions on the chronology of the Pentateuch:

<i>Early Exodus (Long Sojourn)</i>	<i>Early Exodus (Short Sojourn)</i>	<i>Late Exodus</i>	<i>Reconstructionist</i>
Early date for the Exodus and a 430-year sojourn in Egypt per Masoretic reading of Exodus 12:40	Early date for the Exodus and a 215-year sojourn in Egypt per Septuagint reading of Exodus 12:40	Late date for the Exodus and a belief in the historicity of the record of patriarchal events	Late date for the Exodus and reconstruction of biblical history through the use of form criticism
The Patriarchs (2166-1805) Migration to Egypt (1876)	The Patriarchs (1952-1589) Migration to Egypt (1660)	The Patriarchs (1952-1589) Migration to Egypt (1650)	-----
Egyptian Sojourn (1876-1446) Slavery (1730 or 1580)	Egyptian Sojourn (1660-1446) Slavery (1580)	Egyptian Sojourn (1650-1230) Slavery (1580)	The Patriarchs (1500-1300) Gradual migration Egyptian Sojourn (1350-1230)
Wandering (1446-1406) Conquest & Judges (1406-1050)	Wandering (1446-1406) Conquest & Judges (1406-1050)	Conquest & Judges (1230-1025)	Conquest & Judges (1230-1025)
United Kingdom (1050-931)	United Kingdom (1050-931)	United Kingdom (1025-931)	United Kingdom (1025-931)

- **Jewish calendar of sacred feasts:**

<i>Feast</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Text</i>	<i>Occasion</i>
Purim	February/March	Esther 9	Failure of Haman’s plot against the Jews

Passover (Pesach)	March/April	Exodus 12; Leviticus 23:4-8	Deliverance from Egypt
Unleavened Bread (Hag Hamatzot)	March/April	Exodus 12; Leviticus 23:4-8	Deliverance from Egypt
First Fruits (Yom Habikkurim)	March/April	Leviticus 23:9-14	Consecrate first fruits of barley harvest
Pentecost (Shavuot)	May/June	Leviticus 23:15-22	Consecrate first fruits of wheat harvest
Tish'ah be'ah	August	---	Destruction of the temple
Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah)	September/October	Leviticus 23:23-25	Consecrate Sabbatical month
Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)	September/October	Leviticus 23:26-32	Annual atonement for national sins
Tabernacles (Sukkot)	September/October	Leviticus 23:33-43	Wilderness wanderings
Dedication (Hanukkah)	November/ December	John 10:22	Cleansing of temple from defilement

Additional regular feasts: Israel's corporate life was marked by other sacred events:

- **Sabbath**—Every seventh day was a solemn rest from all work (Ex. 20:8-11; Lev. 23:3; Deut. 5:12-15). This reminded Israel that Yahweh was the creator and lent a certain cadence to Israel's worship and a sense of "holiness" or set-apartness to their idea of time.
- **Sabbath Year**—Every seventh year was designated as a "year of release" to allow the land to lie fallow (Ex. 23:10, 11; Lev. 25:1-7). As a practical matter, the poor and socially disadvantaged were to be the beneficiaries of this practice, since they were to be free to glean the leftover produce of the fallow land.
- **Jubilee Year**—The 50th year following the seventh Sabbath year, was to be a general year of release, proclaiming a general forgiveness of all indebtedness and a return of lands sold to their hereditary owners. Jeremiah will link the neglect of this practice with the Babylonian Captivity (Jer. 25:8-14; 2 Chron. 36:17-21).
- **New Moon**—The first day of the Hebrew month was to be a day of rest, special offerings, the blowing of trumpets (Num. 28:11-15).

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p. 36
- God is the ultimate deliverer.

- The Passover is a signpost pointing to the cross of Christ (1 Cor. 5:7-8; see Jn. 1:29; 1 Pt. 1:19). A study of the Passover and its fulfillment in Christ helps us grasp the big picture of God's plan of redemption.
- The power of religious ritual in recalling and keeping present spiritual truth. Always remember is a recurring theme in Scripture. This was built into the Jewish calendar of feasts and festivals. What stories of God's power and mercy in your life could you repeat more often?
- Excuses! Excuses! Excuses! Easy to see it in Moses (Ex. 4). God chose Moses to go to Pharaoh on behalf of the people. However, Moses saw himself as a political fugitive and a poor communicator who had no business going to the king. Are there areas in your life where you're more focused on your limitations than upon God's ability to work through you?

Text to bookmark: Ex. 3:13-14, 12:1-13

Session 5—New Commands and a New Covenant

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 59-70
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 37-42

Biblical text:

- Ex. 19-20, 24-25, 32-34, 40

Session overview—Chapter 5 describes how God met with the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai and revealed to them his covenant promises, laws, and commands. The people were at Mt. Sinai for almost a year, a year that was to prove to be a microcosm of the future history as a nation. On the one hand, they affirmed their commitment to be God's covenant people. In the next instant, they bow down before a calf idol and run wild in idolatrous revelry. Then they are so very sorry. This cycle of sin, repentance and renewal, and regress again will characterize their national spiritual life.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***At Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19)***—There is a debate over the location of the Mt. Sinai of Exodus. Three locations are offered: NW Saudi Arabia or southern Jordan; the northern Sinai peninsula; or the highlands of southern Sinai (Jebel Musa, the traditional site). Wherever, this was where God gave the people his law.
- ***Ten commandments (Ex. 20)***—Structurally, these can be divided into two parts, the first four which emphasize our relationship with God and the last six which emphasize our relationships with people. The Law functions to bring conviction of sin into our lives. Honest reflection reveals our need for God's forgiveness and grace. The Reformers saw a second function as well, that of instruction for God's people.
- ***Worshippers called out (Ex. 24-25)***—These chapters are key portions in Exodus. Ex. 24 is commonly called the book of the Covenant, where Israel confirmed their intention to live as God's people. Ex. 25 opens a segment of seven chapters focusing on the construction of the tabernacle, the ritual center of Israelite worship.
- ***Golden Calf (Ex. 32)***—This chapter records the Golden Calf incident, where the people run wild while Moses was on the mount with God. Unfortunately, this episode is characteristic of Old Testament Israel and of us today. The situation seemed idyllic for a while, but then the nation fell into apostasy and ran wild in idolatrous revelry. This was a portent of things to come, again and again and again.
- ***God with us (Ex. 33-34)***—These chapters highlight that God wants to be with his people, a blessed and important thread of the story through the ages. They also reflect wonderfully on the spirituality of Moses. The segment opens with a threatened separation of Israel from God and Moses' intercessory prayer (Ex. 33). Moses' heart for God is so

very apparent at a crucial point in Israel’s journey. It concludes with the renewal once again of the covenant (Ex. 34).

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 475
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 39-41

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *Exodus summary chart:*

Deliverance				Mosaic Covenant				Tabernacle Construction		
From Egypt		To Sinai						Plan		Response
1	7	12	15 16	19	20	21-23	24	25	27 30	32 35
Slaves	Plagues	Exodus	Sinai	Commands	Laws	Affirm		Specs; Priests; Instructions	Gold calf	Build
Subjection to Redemption				Revelation				Response		

Key idea: Redemption/deliverance

Key verses: 3:14; 6:6; 19:5, 6

Key chapters: 12-14

- *Mosaic Covenant (the Law)*—The Ten Commandments are central to the Covenant (Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21). The first four commandments govern our relationship with God, while the last six order human relationships within the covenant community. These include:

<i>Commands relating to God—negative</i>	<i>Commands relating to God—positive</i>
1. No other gods (20:3, 4)	1. Trust God only (20:3, 4)
2. No idols made or worshipped (20:5, 6)	2. Worship the true God only (20:5, 6)
3. Don’t use God’s name in vain (20:7)	3. Respect God’s name (20:7)
4. Don’t reduce the Sabbath to just any other day (20:8-11)	4. Observe the Sabbath rest in its true spirit (20:8-11)
<i>Commands relating to others—negative</i>	<i>Commands relating to others—positive</i>
5. Don’t diss your parents (20:12)	5. Honor your parents (20:12)
6. No murder or manslaughter (20:13)	6. Protect and respect human life (20:13)
7. No adultery (20:14)	7. Be true to your spouse (20:14)
8. No stealing (20:15)	8. Respect other people’s property (20:15)
9. No lying (20:16)	9. Deal truthfully with others (20:16)
10. No coveting (20:17)	10. Be content with what you have (20:17)

The Law embraces a whole collection of interwoven regulations intended to regulate the moral, ceremonial, and civil life of the people of Israel. It speaks of the conditions of living with a holy God (see Lev. 17-26; Deut. 12-26). The Tabernacle and its cultic practice graphically symbolize these conditions and Yahweh's active presence with His people. The Mosaic Covenant does not set aside the Abrahamic Covenant. It fleshes it out. It speaks to the people of what God required of His covenant people. In its sacrificial system, it pointed to the atoning work of Christ as the basis of any true confidence in approaching a holy God.

- ***Literary form of Law***—In its literary form, the Mosaic Covenant parallels that of the Hittite suzerain treaties of the Middle to Late Bronze Age (second millennium B.C.). Specific elements of the treaty form in the Mosaic Covenant as given in Exodus are as follows:

- Preamble (20:2a)
- Historical prologue (20:2b)
- Stipulations (20:3-17; 20:21-23:19)
- Deposit and public reading (24:7)
- List of witnesses (24:1-11)
- Blessings and curses (23:20-33)

Takeaways:

- ***Participant's Guide***, p. 42
- Be different-set apart-for God's purposes.
- Mosaic covenant in the context of God's revealed covenantal structure, particularly its elaboration of the Abrahamic covenant and its highlighting the need for the New covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26-27; Heb. 8:7-13).
- What is the function of the Ten Commandments and the moral law for Christians today? Note how Jesus elaborates on these commands (Matt. 5:17-48).
- God is no longer presented as dwelling in tabernacles or temples, but in his people, individually and corporately (see 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

Texts to bookmark: Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21

Session 6—Wandering

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 71-88
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 43-48

Biblical text:

- Num. 10-14, 20-21, 25, 27
- Deut. 1-2, 4, 6, 8-9, 29-32, 34

Session overview—Israel had seen much during their year-long stay at Mt. Sinai. God had given them his Law, they had been rescued from idolatry, the tabernacle had been built, and they had witnessed God's presence inhabit it. Yet, within a short time after their departure from Mt. Sinai, the people descended into a constant grumbling. When they arrived at a point of decision whether to trust the Lord and enter the Promised Land, they refused to step forward in faith. That entire generation was condemned to wander and eventually die in the wilderness. Forty years later, a new generation approached their inheritance a second time and Moses gave his farewell addresses, giving the people the choice between life and death, blessing or cursing.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***People forget (Num. 10-12)***—In this segment, Israel leaves Sinai, the people grumble against the Lord and complain about the Lord's provision of manna (they wanted meat), and Miriam and Aaron talk trash about Moses. Faith's mortal enemy is forgetting God's provision and presuming on his blessing. Israel had seen an awesome deliverance, miraculous wonders, but when the going got tough, they forgot God's goodness and yearned for the false security of bondage.
- ***Crisis of faith (Num. 13-14, 20)***—At Kadesh-barnea, Israel stood at the border of the Promised Land, but refused to go in (Num. 13-14). Fear, rather than faith, characterized their response and they were condemned to wander in the wilderness. Moses forfeits his entrance into the land at the episode of getting water from the rock (Num. 20).
- ***Fighting battles (Num. 21, 25)***—This period witnessed two different types of battles. The outward one was against the warlords and tribal chieftains who controlled many of the areas through which Israel wandered (Num. 21). The inner battles was the war for the allegiance of the peoples' hearts (Num. 25). Idolatry and immorality were constant temptations.
- ***Transitions (Num. 27; Deut. 1-2, 4, 6, 8-9, 29-32, 34)***—Moses passed the baton to Joshua and had some lengthy parting words for the people. Deuteronomy reads like a number of long sermons in which Moses spoke of God's covenant and reminded the people of their unique identity as God's people and of the privileges and responsibilities that entails. Deuteronomy clearly resembles the structure of ancient treaties:
 - Preamble—1:1-5
 - Historical prologue—1:6-4:49
 - General stipulations—5:1-11:32

Specific stipulations—12:1-26:19
 Blessings and curses—27:1-28:68
 Document clause—31:9-29
 Witnesses—32:1-47

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, pp. 475-476
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 45-47

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *Numbers summary chart:*

Old Generation Reorganized and Readied		Tragic Transition and Wanderings				New Generation At the Threshold
Reorganizing 1	Purifying 8	To Kadesh 10	At Kadesh 13	In the Wilderness 15	Moab Plains 20	At the Border and Reorganized 26
At Mt. Sinai		In the Wilderness				Plains of Moab
About 1 Month		About 38 years				About 6 Months

Key idea: Wandering; testing
 Key verses: 14:22-23; 20:12
 Key chapter: 14

- *Deuteronomy summary chart:*

1:1-4:43	4:44-11:1	12-26			27-30	31-34
Review of God’s acts for Israel	Decalogue Expounded	Ceremonial Laws 12	Civil Laws 16:18	Social Laws 21	Covenant Rati- fication and Transition: Warnings and Challenges	Succession; Final Blessing; Death of Moses
Sermon 1	Sermon 2	Sermon 2 (continued)			Sermon 3	Continuity; Conclusion
What God has done	What God expected	What God expected (continued)			What God will do	Wrapping up

Key idea: Covenant renewal
 Key verses: 10:12-13; 30:19-20
 Key chapters: 6; 27-28

- ***Illustrations of spiritual truth***—Two detailed New Testament passages refer to the wilderness wanderings of Israel as illustrations of spiritual truth. 1 Corinthians 10:11 states their function explicitly: “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.” In 1 Corinthians 10:1-12, Israel’s wanderings serve as a warning against self-indulgence and immorality. In Hebrews 3:7-4:6, they illustrate negatively the theme of entering God’s rest by faith.
- ***Testing***—The idea of a probationary period runs throughout the Pentateuch:
 - In the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:15-17)
 - For angelic hosts (1 Tim 5:21)
 - For Abraham (Gen 22:1-14)
 - For the loyalty of Joseph’s brothers (Gen 44:1-17)
 - Wilderness wanderings as covenantal testing (Deut. 8:1-2)

The New Testament is in accord with this understanding. Even Jesus is tested in every respect so that He might be our sympathetic High Priest (Mt 4:1-11; Heb. 4:14-16). In the book of James, two different words are used for “testing” which conforms to Old Testament patterns and New Testament teaching. James emphasizes that God tests individuals with a view to approving faith and developing godly character, but does not tempt individuals, goading them on to evil or undermining their faith.

Takeaways:

- ***Participant’s Guide***, pp. 48
- God’s promises demands our trust.
- The function of testing and temptation.
- Avoid retreating to familiar and comfortable situations that are spiritually unhealthy.
- Lost and wandering situations are often falsely portrayed as examples of heroic courage of truly authentic existential people living in the moment in our modern era. What bunk! Living aimlessly and without direction isn’t about courage, but spiritual willfulness, foolishness, or laziness (or all of these). An overly harsh assessment?
- Passing on a healthy and positive legacy of faith to the next generation.

Text to bookmark: Num. 23:19

Session 7—The Battle Begins

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 89-102
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 49-54

Biblical text:

- Josh. 1-2, 6, 8, 10-11, 23-24

Session overview—Joshua stood at the same place he did forty years earlier when he watched the people turn away from their inheritance and wander in the desert for a generation. The challenge—to take possession of the Promised Land—had not changed. However, the people had. The faithless generation had passed away and a new generation ready and willing to be led had arisen. Key themes emerge as the people move forward to possess their inheritance:

- The Lord was their strength, not the size and ability of their army;
- Their mission demanded courage;
- Their courage and success depended on trusting obedience.

Central to the conquest is the theme of fulfillment. The Lord was fulfilling his promise to the patriarchs. The land is the chosen people's legacy. However, the conquest is also presented as a righteous judgment on the sins of the native peoples of Canaan.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Jericho falls (Josh. 1-2, 6)***—This segment delineates Rahab's role in hiding the Israeli spies at Jericho and the Jewish conquest of that significant Canaanite fortress city. While most of the conquest did not involve the total destruction of cities, three (Jericho, Ai, and Hazor) were razed to the ground. These cities either had long histories of immorality and idolatry or were particularly deceitful.
- ***Achan and Ai (Josh. 8)***—Achan could not keep his hands off the loot. Note how the covetous disobedience of an Israelite that brought defeat to the entire nation before the city of Ai (Josh. 8) is contrasted with the story of Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute who risked all to save two Israelite spies (Josh. 2). Achan is judged; Rahab rewarded beyond measure. She not only had a place in the covenant community, but would become one of the direct ancestors of the Lord Jesus.
- ***Troublesome alliances (Josh. 10-11)***—This segment records the first of many compromising alliances Israel will make with her neighbors. Israel makes a foolish alliance with Gibeon without consulting the Lord (Josh. 9). There were immediate consequences (Josh. 10) and future ones as well (2 Sam. 21). Decisions we make now affect our future. The lesson is clear—the Lord's way is the way.
- ***Whom will you serve (Josh. 23-24)***—It's recommitment time and Joshua leads the way. In this segment, Joshua reminds the people of the Lord's faithfulness and challenges the people to recommit themselves to following the Lord. Jesus gives us a similar choice today (Mk. 8:34-36).

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 476.
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 51-53

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *Joshua summary chart:*

Preparing	Spies	Jordan	Pillars of Stone	Circumcision; Commander	Central: Jericho & Ai	South: Gibeon; Summary	Northern Campaign	Kings List	East Bank	West Bank	Cities of Refuge; Levites	Altar of Witness	Charge to Leaders	Shechem Renewal
1	Invasion			5	6	Conquest		12	13Distribution		22Conditions			
									21		24			
Preparation					Subjection				Possession			Charge		

Key idea: Covenant faithfulness

Key verses: 21:43-45; 24:14-15

Key chapter: 24

- **Two Major Dating Systems**—Some archaeological data seems to support a date for Joshua's invasion of Palestine around 1250 BC. This would place the Exodus about 40 years earlier under the famous Pharaoh Rameses II. Other data suggests an earlier date, putting Joshua's invasion around 1400 BC. This would mean that the Exodus (often placed at 1446 BC) took place in the reign of Pharaoh Amenhotep II (1450-1423 BC) shortly after the death of Pharaoh Thutmose III (1500-1450 BC), the so-called Napoleon of Egypt. Thutmose III was known to have made extensive use of slave labor (Israelites?) in his building projects. The earlier date fits the biblical numbers better than the later one. In 1 Kings 6:1, the Exodus is dated 480 years prior to the commencement of the construction of the Temple in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, probably 967-966 BC. Also, in Judges 11:26, Jephthah indicates that Israel had been in control of certain parts of Canaan for 300 years. Since Jephthah probably lived around 1100 BC, this verse fits the early Exodus chronology quite nicely. However, many think the later date better fits the archaeological findings.

Takeaways:

- *Participant’s Guide*, p. 54
- Faith is the victory.

- Be strong and courageous. God is bigger than our giants and it's his battle. How does consistent and faith-filled reading, hearing, and studying of God's Word help us to be strong and courageous as we swim upstream against the currents of a worldly culture?
- Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute, is saved by faith just like any of the chosen people. God's redemptive plan includes people other than Israel from the beginning.
- Do you tend to shrink back from a challenge? Does reading Joshua 1 help you?
- Importance of prayer and obedience (drawing lessons from Israel's experience at Ai and with the people of Gibeon).

Text to bookmark: Josh. 1:8, 24:14-15.

Session 8—A Few Good Men...and Women

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 103-119
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 55-60

Biblical text:

- Judg. 2-4, 6-8, 13-16

Session overview—Israel's failure to completely drive out the native peoples of Canaan led them to idolatry and periods of political subjection. Judges records an era of spiritual compromise. The people of Israel got caught up in a cycle of failure: sin/oppression/repentance/deliverance. This cycle repeats itself again and again throughout the book. One of the central themes throughout the Scriptures is God's fidelity to his word, despite our faithlessness.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Sin cycle (Judges 2-3)***—This segment describes how the failure to drive out the native peoples led to their corruption and failure. The people forgot that they were to be a distinctive, set apart people in a degenerate culture. They were pulled into the sin cycle and got trapped in Canaanite-like idolatry.
- ***Deborah and Barak (Judges 4)***—Deborah and Barak are used to deliver Israel from the Canaanites. Excavations at Hazor have provided evidence of massive destruction that occurred in the time of Deborah and Barak.
- ***God's prophet (Judges 6)***—This segment records the Lord's prophet bringing a message to the people. In the midst of a locusts plague, a prophet appears to apply God's revelation to the contemporary situation and calling the people to repentance.
- ***Gideon (Judges 6)***—The story continues elaborating how God used Gideon to deliver the people from the Midianites. Gideon was a flawed man with an idolatrous past who struggled with fear and was inclined to disobey God's commands. Yet God uses him. Gideon's tale emphasizes the moral confusion of this era. In the era of the Judges, God worked with fearful, sinful, selfish, "heroes" to deliver his people.
- ***Samson and the Philistines (Judges 13-16)***—This segment records the career of Samson, perhaps the most flawed of all the judges. The Philistines were the sea peoples who invaded the Near East during the era of the Judges. Rameses III turned them back from Egypt and they settled along the coast in Palestine. Samson is called to lead the Israelite resistance to and deliverance from the Philistines. The two stories recorded at the end of Judges (17-21) dealing with Levites (and one a descendant of Moses himself) reveal how profoundly the people had been corrupted. The text ends with a telling summary of the age: "In those days, Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, pp. 476-477
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 57-59

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *Judges summary chart:*

Failure to conquer 1	Judged for failure 2	Othniel; Ehud; Shamgar 3	Deborah & Barak 4	Gideon; Midian 6	Abimelech; Tola; Jair 9	Jephthah; Ammon 10	Samson; Philistia 13	Levite & idolatry 17	Levite & civil war 21
Cause of the cycles		Description of the cycles					Conditions in the cycles		
Living with the Canaanites		War with the Canaanites					Living like the Canaanites		
Deterioration		Deliverance					Depravity		

Key idea: Spiritual compromise

Key verse: 21:25

Key chapter: 2

- *Judges chronology:*

<i>Text</i>	<i>Oppressor</i>	<i>Estimated dates</i>	<i>Deliverer</i>	<i>Peace afterwards</i>
3:8-11	Mesopotamia	1385-1377 BC 1377-1337	Othniel (Judah)	40 years
3:12-30	Moab	1337-1319 1319-1239	Ehud (Benjamin)	80 years
3:31	Philistia	Unknown	Shamgar	Unknown
4:1-5:31	Canaanites	1259-1239 1239-1219	Deborah (Ephraim) Barak (Naphtali)	40 years
6:1-8:35	Midian	1199-1192 1192-1152	Gideon (Manasseh)	40 years
9:1-57	Civil war (Abimelech)	1152-1149		
10:1-2	Unknown	1149-1126	Tola (Issachar)	45 years
10:3-5	Unknown	1126-1104	Jair (?)	
10:6-12:7	Ammonites	1104-1086 1086-1080	Jephthah (?)	6, 8, 10, and 7 years
12:8-10	Unknown	1080-1072	Ibzan (Judah)	
12:11-12	Unknown	1072-1062	Elon (Zebulun)	
12:13-15	Unknown	1062-1055	Abdon (Ephraim)	
13:1-16:31	Philistia	1115-1075	Samson (Dan)	20 years

		1075-1055		
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- Historical and geographical background**—The period of the Judges lasted from approximately 1380 until 1050 BC or 1220 to 1020 BC, depending on the dating system used. If the earlier date is correct, the period coincided with an era in which Egypt grew strangely introspective under the pharaohs of the Amarna era (Akhenaton, Tutankmun (King Tut), and Ay). If the later date is correct, the judges period follows on a time in which Egypt renewed her interest in Palestine during the Nineteenth Dynasty (1318-1222 BC), the dynasty that followed the Amarna period. Rameses II fought with the Hittites, a people originating in modern-day Turkey, for the control of Palestine, and his successor, Merneptah (1234-1222 BC), recorded a successful campaign in Palestine on a victory stele (column), which listed Israel among the defeated peoples. In the 12th Century BC, the Middle East was rocked by a series of invasions of the "Sea Peoples". The Hittite Empire fell before their onslaught and Egypt only succeeded in repulsing them due to the energy and ability of Rameses III (1190-1164 BC). After their defeat in Egypt, many of these "Sea Peoples" settled along the southwest coast of Palestine, joining the earlier Minoan settlers (a people originating in Crete) in the area. These Philistines, as they became known, were a dominant power in the area in the 12th and 11th Centuries BC and an oppressor of Israel. In addition, with the wane of Egyptian power after Rameses III, many smaller nations took turns dominating various parts of Palestine and oppressing the Jewish people.
- Judges cycle**—The cycle of apostasy/oppression/repentance or request for deliverance/deliverance/peace forms the basic structure of the middle of the book of Judges (3:7-16:31).

Takeways:

- Participant's Guide**, p. 60
- The call of faith versus the lure of the culture.
- Leaders with feet of clay.
- Sin cycle.
- Summary of the age: "Everyone did as he saw fit." Any parallels to our age?
- Do you identify with the hymn writer's self-assessment:
"Prone to wander, Lord I feel it
Prone to leave the God I love
Do you share the hymn writer's intention:
"Here's my heart Lord, take and seal it
Seal it for Thy courts above."

Session 9—The Faith of a Foreign Woman

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 121-127
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 61-66

Biblical text: Ruth 1-4

Session overview—This session records the story of Ruth, which highlights an emerging biblical theme: God's saving purpose is not confined to a particular nation. Israel was to be a particular people who would serve as God's herald to the nations. We get a glimpse of that with the story of Rahab, who was welcomed into the covenant community after sheltering the Israelite spies. In this book, we have a tale of two destitute women struggling to survive and a faithful man (Boaz) committed to doing the right thing. The book bears Ruth's name, a Moabite modification of the Hebrew word for friendship. Ruth is a story of love, devotion, and redemption set in the backdrop of the faithless age of the Judges. Ruth's faithfulness, at a time of rampant national immorality, rebellion, and apostasy, is rewarded—she finds a husband (Boaz), has a son (Obed), and a blessed heritage (the line of David). How did faith survive in such a coarse environment as the age of the Judges? Ruth suggests that it survived in the decent families of common folk.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Lost and found (Ruth 1)***—This segment sets up the reason for the desperate situation of Naomi and Ruth. In a time of famine in Israel, Naomi and her family move to Moab. Her sons marry Moabite women (one of whom was Ruth). Then Naomi loses everything. Her husband and both of her sons die. She was alone in a foreign land when Ruth amazingly commits to leaving her ancestral home and deities and to return to Israel with her mother-in-law.
- ***Making ends meet (Ruth 2-3)***—Ruth goes out into the fields to glean in order to attempt to feed herself and Naomi. Providentially, she is led to the fields of Boaz who shows her kindness.
- ***Kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 3-4)***—In a tribal culture, near kinsman were expected to take care of relatives. The next-of-kin (*go'el*) were expected to redeem the property or person of the relative, to provide an heir through marriage, and to avenge the unlawful death of a family member. Ruth requests Boaz to fulfill this role and he does so even though not technically required to (there was a kinsman nearer than him). He had seen Ruth's faithfulness, diligence, and integrity and doubtlessly felt privileged to find such a woman.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 477
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 63-65

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- **Ruth summary chart:**

1—Ruth renouncing	2—Ruth reaping	3—Ruth requesting	4—Ruth rejoicing
Moab	Bethlehem fields	Threshing floor	Bethlehem village
Ruth’s love demonstrated		Ruth’s love rewarded	

Key idea: Redemption

Key verses: 1:16; 3:11

Key chapter: 4

- **Redemption**—The theme of redemption can be seen in the custom of levirate marriage and in the land redemption law. Levirate marriage required the nearest relative of a deceased person to marry his widow and raise up a family in his stead (Deut. 25:5-10). The offspring of the second marriage carried forth the name and inheritance of the former husband. The land redemption law (Lev. 25:25-28) obligated the next of kin to buy back land that had been sold due to foreclosure or poverty in order to keep it in the family. The land law and the custom of levirate marriage were intended to preserve both the family line and the family’s livelihood (land, in an agrarian society). The person who did this was the kinsman redeemer (*go’el*). This person portrays the work of Christ in that he must be related by blood to those he redeems (Deut. 25:5, 7-10), be able to pay the price of redemption (Ruth 2:1), and be willing to redeem (Ruth 3:11). The *go’el* provided the means by which the jeopardized covenant blessings could be regained and served as an appropriate type of God’s grace. Yahweh constantly acted as Israel’s *go’el* and the New Testament applies this concept to the role of Christ.
- **Loving-kindness (*hesed*)**—This book reveals the meaning of *hesed* on both human and divine levels. Indeed, Ruth’s stirring expression of commitment to Naomi is almost a definition of *hesed* (see 1:16-17). This loving-kindness and committed loyalty is graphically highlighted in an age where “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).
- **Providence**—God’s providential care is highlighted as well. The circumstances of this little drama are no accident. This humble, loyal Moabite woman ends up in the ancestral line of Israel’s greatest king, David, and indeed of Messiah himself.

Takeaways:

- **Participant’s Guide**, p. 66

- God's redemptive plan is costly and extends to all the peoples of the earth.
- Redemptive grace illustrated; extending grace to others in tangible, practical ways.
- Boaz as Naomi/Ruth's kinsman redeemer; Jesus as ours.

Texts to bookmark: Ruth 1:16-17, 2:11-12.

Chapter 10—Standing Tall, Falling Hard

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 129-143
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 67-72

Biblical text:

- 1 Sam. 1-4, 8-13, 15

Session overview—The record of the kingdom begins. Israel's first king, Saul, listens to God at first but eventually caves to fear and grows increasingly disobedient to the Lord. What makes Hannah, Samuel, and David special and unique is that they each nurtured a dependence on the Lord. C.S. Lewis once remarked that each of us will either submit to the Lord saying "Thy will be done" or hear a word of judgment of God saying "Thy will be done."

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Last judge (Sam. 1-4)***—This segment describes Samuel's birth and calling and the massive defeat of Israel at the hands of the Philistines. Judges describes a culture in decline and this was the scene in which Samuel operated. This culture was epitomized by Eli's corrupt sons. Eli failed as a father but succeeded as a mentor. He taught Samuel to hear and respond to the voice of the Lord.
- ***First king (1 Sam. 8-10)***—This segment records the people's request for a king. Samuel warns them about wanting a king. The price was high. Kings would take their sons and daughters, their fields and livestock, and their servants and income. The people persist and Samuel anoints Saul as Israel's first king.
- ***Saul in battle (1 Sam. 11-13, 15)***—These chapters describe Saul's early reign. Saul's kingship begins with promise. He wins a victory over the Ammonites. However, his failure to destroy the Amalekites as instructed by the Lord began his downfall as a leader. Note that this act of disobedience would have consequences many years down the road as well. Haman, a descendant of the spared Amalekite king, Agag, would one day threaten the Jews with complete annihilation.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, pp. 477-478
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 69-71

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *1 Samuel summary chart:*

Birth of Samuel	Eli to Samuel	Ark Captured	Ark's Return; Victory	Request: King	Choice of Saul	Sacrifice	Foolish Vow	Disobedience	David Anointed	Saul's servant	Goliath	Priests of Nob	Wilderness	To Philistines	Saul's Death
1 First 4 Transition: Eli to Samuel	5 Samuel 7 as Judge	8 Second 12 Transition: Samuel to Saul	15 Early Reign and Rejection of Saul	16 Third Transition: Waning of Saul 31 and Rise of David											
Eli	Samuel	Saul			David										
Decline of Judges			Rise of Monarchy												

Key ideas: Leadership transitions; Monarchy and theocracy

Key verses: 15:22; 16:7

Key chapters: 15-16

- **Transition to kingship**—A key theme is the tension surrounding the need and desire for a king. Judges highlights the need for a stronger central authority. 1 Samuel cautions on the down side of kingship – trusting their own resources instead of God and the king's usurpation of God's authority. The people's fault was not in requesting a king, indeed Deut. 17:14-20 seems to anticipate a kingship in Israel, but in their expectation that a human king could succeed where Yahweh had failed. The people assumed they were oppressed because they lacked someone to fight their battles for them. They were oppressed because of their sin. Kingship of itself would not cure this problem; indeed, it exacerbated it.
- **Assessment of kings**—The books of Samuel apply a common format regarding the kings of the united monarchy. They relate the appointment of the king, describe his potential and successes, before recounting his failures and the consequences of those failures. Thus, Saul, while well-intentioned and starting out with promise, ended an abysmal failure. He lost the empowering from God that was essential for a successful king (1 Sam 16). But even before that, he seemed to lack spiritual sensibility (1 Sam. 14; 15). His visit a medium to gain spiritual insight (1 Sam. 28) suggests that he never quite "got it" – that he misunderstood the basic tenets of orthodox Jewish theology. On the other hand, David is a man after God's own heart. However, his failures abound -- his lies cost people their lives (1 Sam. 21); his duplicity lead him to execute people (1 Sam. 27); his lust entangles him in murder (2 Sam. 11); his failure to discipline his children contributes to sexual offense and murder (2 Sam. 13-14); his pride brings pestilence that devastates the land (2 Sam. 24).

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p. 72

- Obedience matters.
- Our natural tendency towards “herding”. Israel wanted to be just like all the other nations. God wanted them to be a distinctive people. God isn’t looking for people who want to be like everyone else. He is looking for people who want to be like Christ.
- Human tendency to grasp for false security in earthly props.
- Importance of character and the deceptiveness of appearance in human leadership.
- Part of Saul’s sorry legacy points to the human capacity for self-deception and to rationalize sin.

Text to bookmark: 1 Sam. 15:22

Chapter 11—From Shepherd to King

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 145-160
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 73-79

Biblical text:

- 1 Sam. 16-18, 24
- 2 Sam. 6, 22
- 1 Chron. 17
- Ps. 59

Session overview—Although anointed to be king, David spent several years on the run from an increasingly suspicious and deranged King Saul. A willingness to wait on the Lord defined and refined David's character. David could wait for the kingship, could wait upon the Lord for events to unfold, and could gather supplies and treasure for a temple his son would build because he trusted the Lord to provide the best.

Bible episode summaries:

- *Lord's anointed (1 Sam. 16)*—In this segment, Samuel anoints David, the youngest son of Jesse, as king-in-waiting so to speak during the failing reign of King Saul. Samuel wasn't looking at outward appearance, but at the heart. He found a true-heart in David and anointed him to be king.
- *David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17)*—This segment relates the familiar Bible story of David and Goliath. David courageously trusted God although every advantage seemed to be with Goliath. Hand-to-hand combat was celebrated in the ancient world as a way to demonstrate whose god was stronger. David implicitly knew that trusting the Lord rather than physical advantage was the ticket to ride.
- *David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18)*—This chapter relates that David was a man capable of bonding relationships and that is seen in his friendship with Jonathan. Jonathan, for his part, realizes that he himself was not destined to rule, but David instead. That he willingly relinquished his family inheritance, bowing to the will of God, reveals the caliber of Jonathan's character.
- *David and Saul (1 Sam. 18, 24; Ps. 59)*—This segment records Saul's murderous pursuit of David. The king's madness and David's innocence lie at the core of the narrative. David's character is revealed in his refusal to raise his hand against the Lord's anointed even in defense of his own life.
- *Tragic end (1 Sam. 31; 2 Sam. 22)*—This segment records the defeat of Saul and Jonathan at Mt. Gilboa, marking the tragic end of a reign that started with promise.

Jonathan’s death is particularly sad. He remained loyal to both his increasingly deranged father and to his friendship with David at enormous personal cost.

- **Unashamed (2 Sam. 6)**—This chapter describes David unashamedly dancing before the Lord while the ark is brought to Jerusalem. Michal, Saul’s daughter and David’s wife, watches with contempt. David was a man after God’s own heart, unconcerned about his relative status in the eyes of others.
- **House of the Lord (1 Chron. 17)**—This chapter parallels 2 Samuel 7 and relates that while David longed to build the temple to the Lord, that would be his son’s task. Nevertheless, God rewards David for his heart priority with the promises of the Davidic Covenant.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 478
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 75-78

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *1 Samuel summary chart:*

Birth of Samuel	Eli to Samuel	Ark Captured	Ark’s Return; Victory	Request: King	Choice of Saul	Sacrifice	Foolish Vow	Disobedience	David Anointed	Saul’s servant	Goliath	Priests of Nob	Wilderness	To Philistines	Saul’s Death
1 First Transition: Eli to Samuel	4	5 Samuel as Judge	7	8 Second Transition: Samuel to Saul	12	15 Early Reign and Rejection of Saul			16 Third Transition: Waning of Saul and Rise of David						31
Eli	Samuel	Saul			David										
Decline of Judges				Rise of Monarchy											

Key ideas: Leadership transitions; Monarchy and theocracy

Key verses: 15:22; 16:7

Key chapters: 15-16

- **Davidic Covenant (2 Sam. 7)** The Davidic Covenant promised to make David’s name great, to provide a place for Israel to flourish, and to make that land secure. All of these are encompassed in the Abrahamic Covenant. Where advance on the Abrahamic

Covenant comes is with the Lord's promise that David's descendants would be established on the throne after him. The hope that someday a Davidic king would come who would satisfy the conditions of faithfulness and bring the full restoration promised by the covenant was the foundation of the messianic theology and hope that so animated the prophets. The New Testament writers came to recognize Jesus, David's greater son, as the one who would bring the renewal promised by the covenant with David.

Takeways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p. 79
- The Lord knows our hearts and accepts us according to our heart orientation.
- Davidic covenant—the hope that someday a Davidic king would come who would satisfy the conditions of faithfulness and bring the full restoration promised by the covenant was the foundation of the messianic theology and hope that so energized the prophets.
- Waiting on God. David was in a spiritual boot camp for some fourteen years between his anointing and his accession as king. Have you ever had lengthy waits for things you thought had planned for your life?
- Unashamed—forthright in testimony; exuberant in worship; steadfastly loyal.

Text to bookmark: 2 Sam. 7:12-16

Chapter 12—The Trials of a King

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 161-173
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 81-87

Biblical text:

- 2 Sam. 11-12, 18-19
- 1 Chron. 22, 29
- Pss. 23, 32, 51

Session overview—This is a tragic story of David bringing on all sorts of family misery for a moment of pleasure that he covered up. The Lord granted forgiveness but David lived with the consequences of his sin for the rest of his life. One of his sons will rape his own half-sister. When David does nothing to address the injustice perhaps because of his own prior guilt, Absalom will murder his half-brother to avenge of his sister. Soon, Absalom's resentment against his father fuels an open rebellion. David had stolen another man's wife and tried to cover it up. Absalom takes David's concubines on the rooftop of the palace in full view of the people. There are no perfect people. Even our greatest heroes have feet of clay.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11)***—This chapter informs us that David stayed behind while the army goes on campaign. He's in the wrong place at the wrong time. David commits adultery with Bathsheba and then tries to cover it up. The cover up involves the murder of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband. The chapter's clear focus is on the massive failure of David as a man and a king at a time when he was seemingly on top of the world.
- ***Conviction and repentance (2 Sam. 12; Ps. 51)***—This chapter chronicles how Nathan confronts David, who compounded his sin of adultery with that of murder in attempting to cover things up. David does not hide, but openly confesses. The bony finger of Nathan in David's face "You are the man" reveals one of the roles of the Old Testament prophets. The prophetic voice demanded subjection of all (king to pauper) to the Law of God. Psalm 51 records David's heartfelt repentance and the realization that he had nowhere else to go but to the sovereign mercy of almighty God.
- ***Consequences (2 Sam. 12; Ps. 32)***—2 Samuel 12 also records two consequences prophesied by Nathan. First, the child conceived by David and Bathsheba's illicit union dies. Second, what David did secretly to Uriah will be done publicly to him (by his own son Absalom in 2 Samuel 16).
- ***Absalom (2 Sam. 18-19)***—Absalom leads a rebellion against his father David that is defeated. He was initially driven by a sense of vengeance. He waits two years after the rape of his sister before murdering Amnon. Banished, he returns and conspires to replace his father. He nearly succeeds. With Absalom's death, David returns to Jerusalem and resumes his reign.

- **Solomon (1 Chron. 22, 29)**—These chapters relate how David groomed Solomon to succeed him. He included Solomon in planning for the temple, gathered supplies for the project, and surrounded his son with trusted advisers. David’s prayer on his deathbed (1 Chron. 29:10ff.) is one of the great prayers of the Bible and a window into the heart of a man who genuinely loved God.
- **Shepherd (Ps. 23)**—This psalm of David has been a favorite since its composition. The metaphor of the shepherd came to apply to both kings and gods. The care of the shepherd for his own was seen as a paramount trait of both royalty and divinity.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 478.
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 83-86

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *2 Samuel summary chart:*

Reign in Hebron; Civil War	Anointed; in Jerusalem	Ark in Jerusalem	Davidic Covenant	Military Triumphs	Bathsheba and Uriah	Nathan Confronts	Incest and Murder in the Household	Absalom’s Rebellion	Restoration	Final Days: Famine, War, and Plague
1 4	5			10	11					24
Rise to Power	David’s Successes				David’s Transgressions and Failures					

Key ideas: Kingship in theocracy

Key verses: 7:12-16

Key chapters: 7; 11

Takeaways:

- *Participant’s Guide*, p. 87
- Consequences of sin—The “no consequence for sin” portrayal in modern media is perhaps the biggest lie of all and echoes the serpent’s original version in the Garden: “You surely will not die”.
- Domino effect of sin. David went from lust to coveting to adultery to lying to murder. Note the immediate effects on others—Bathsheba-Uriah-Nathan-Joab-other soldiers-baby conceived by Bathsheba-others in David’s court.
- Steps to prevent affairs; caring enough to confront.

Texts to bookmark: 1 Chron. 29:10-13; Pss. 32, 51.

Chapter 13—The King Who Had It All

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 175-192
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 89-94

Biblical text:

- 1 Kings 1-8, 10-11
- 2 Chron. 5-7
- Prov. 1-3, 6, 20-21

Session overview—David was a warrior. His son Solomon was a builder. Solomon built the temple, a system of foreign alliances, an extensive government bureaucracy, and a body of intellectual work (authoring proverbs, writing poetry, and waxing philosophical). He built a reputation for wisdom second to none. However, he also built an extensive harem, which led him to build altars to foreign gods and to sacrifice on those altars. While he was building structures to rule and strengthen the nation, he was also building practices that would destroy it.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Except that ... (1 Kings 1-3)***—These chapters record that Solomon was a man of exceptional talent and abilities. He succeeds to the throne amidst contention among David's possible heirs and quickly consolidates his rule, displaying great wisdom. Early on we witness a genuine desire to please God, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places (1 Ki. 3:3). These "except that's" will multiply and ultimately define him and trip him up.
- ***No equal (1 Kings 3-4)***—These chapters record Solomon's wisdom and the extent and quality of his kingly administration. Solomon extolled the benefits of wisdom and build a wonderful reputation for his own wisdom. When given a one wish kind of opportunity from the Lord, he asked for wisdom to govern the people. The Lord granted him wisdom in large measure as well as great wealth and prominence,
- ***Proverbs (Prov. 1-3, 6, 20-21)***—Solomon's proverbs reflect an effort to insert the law of God into all of life. They are a demonstration of wisdom, knowledge rightly applied.
- ***Temple formed and filled (1 Kings 5-8; 2 Chron. 5-7)***—These chapters recount the building and opening of the temple of the Lord. They detail the preparations, the care in construction, the furnishings, and Solomon's wonderful prayer of dedication. The Old Testament is filled with the motif of "God with us". It begins with the garden of Eden, moves through the accounts of Abraham and Moses, and can be seen in the construction and filling of Solomon's temple. The filling of the temple with the presence of God is a foreshadowing of the incarnation, when the Son of God was with us in the flesh (Jn. 1:14). It also hints at the nature of the church as a living temple filled with the presence of God (1 Pt. 2:5). Finally, it points us to the hope and promise of the new heavens and earth when the full realization of "God with us" will be sublimely fulfilled.

- **Accumulation (1 Kings 10-11)**—Solomon had in all—wisdom, wealth, and power, These chapters document that. Heady stuff! The accumulation of wives, wealth, and weapons did Solomon in. While wealth itself is not condemned in the Bible, the Scripture does warn that wealth can allow character weaknesses to be probed and exploited.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 479
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 91-93

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *1 Kings summary chart:*

David Appoints Solomon	Wisdom Given and Demonstrated	Temple and Palace	Covenant Promise and Warning Solomon’s Reign Described	Division of the Kingdom’	Early Kingdoms in Conflict	Ahab; Elijah & Conflict of Yahwehism vs Baalism	War with Aram Jehoshaphat
1 2 Consolidation	3 5 Ascendancy	9 10 11 Decline	12	14	17 Elijah’s ministry	20 22	
Solomon’s glory				Divided kingdoms			
United monarchy				Kingdoms of Israel & Judah			
Kingdom at peace				Kingdoms in turmoil			

Key idea: Covenant infidelity

Key verse: 11:11

Key chapter: 12

- **In Proverbs**, wisdom (*hokma*) is personified in the book because God relates his wisdom personally to people. This wisdom is dispensed in the form of fatherly counsel, steering his children in right paths of living. Human wisdom is born in the fear of Yahweh and expresses itself in skillful living. It never consists in merely grasping true information; it is the insightful application of this to daily life. The fear of the Lord encompasses respect and awe of Yahweh and a knowledge of him based on revelation and not on our own speculation. Wisdom involves and respects the inscrutability of God.
- **Money, sex, and power** are some of the bugaboos of earthly life. In themselves, they are gifts of God to cultivate and extend a life that would honor him. Proverbs frequently extols the usefulness of money and the need to respect the exercise of earthly political power. The wise exercise of such power is a boon to many. However, these gifts can shift

our focus and reliance to something other than God and ultimately become an idolatrous lure.

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p. 94
- Finishing well versus end of life foolishness.
- Eyes off the prize—the price of entanglement.
- Wisdom to understand our true spiritual state.

Text to bookmark: Prov. 1:7, 3:5-6

Chapter 14—A Kingdom Torn in Two

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 193-202
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 95-100

Biblical text:

- 1 Kings 12-16

Session overview—In three short generations, Israel went from begging for a king to demanding that the “weight” of royalty be significantly reduced. Rehoboam’s foolishness begins a period where the kings will be a source of the nation’s undoing. Rehoboam’s refusal to back away from his father’s forced labor policies, heavy taxation, and extensive bureaucratic control brought rebellion and division to the nation. After the division of the kingdom, only six of Judah’s twenty kings are categorized as “doing right” in the eyes of the Lord. None of Israel’s kings rate by that measure. The monarchy became a catalyst for the dissolution of the nation.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Split (1 Kings 12)***—This chapter records Rehoboam’s foolishness upon his succession to the throne. Exhibiting all the shortcomings of arrogant and short-sighted youth, Rehoboam follows the advice of his idiot circle rather than that of his older counselors and refused to listen to the people’s grievances. Jeroboam led a revolt that resulted in the division of the kingdom.
- ***Calves (1 Kings 12-14)***—These chapters record Jeroboam’s construction of idolatrous shrines at Bethel and Dan. Fearful that the natural cycle of Israel’s religious festivals would lead the people back to Rehoboam in Jerusalem, Jeroboam set up calf idols and actively promoted idolatry in the Northern Kingdom. The calf idols proved to be a stumbling block to the people who were seduced and trapped again by foreign gods.
- ***Inheritance plundered (1 Kings 14-16)***—These chapters record the plundering of Judah by Egypt and the constant warfare between Israel and Judah that greatly weakened both kingdoms. David had accumulated an enormous treasure to build the temple. His grandson saw that treasure plundered early in his reign. However, more than treasure would be lost over time. By the time of the reign of King Josiah, some of the priests “re-discovered” the Book of the Law in a dusty storeroom of the temple. The Law of the Lord had been lost in the temple of the Lord. How ironic and yet, in the history of God’s people, how common.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 479.
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 97-99

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *1 Kings summary chart:*

David Appoints Solomon	Wisdom Given and Demonstrated	Temple and Palace	Covenant Promise and Warning Solomon's Reign Described	Division of the Kingdom'	Early Kingdoms in Conflict	Ahab; Elijah & Conflict of Yahwehism vs Baalism	War with Aram Jehoshaphat
1 2 Consolidation	3 5 Ascendancy	9 10 11 Decline	12	14	17 20 22 Elijah's ministry		
Solomon's glory				Divided kingdoms			
United monarchy				Kingdoms of Israel & Judah			
Kingdom at peace				Kingdoms in turmoil			

Key idea: Covenant infidelity

Key verse: 11:11

Key chapter: 12

- **Covenant faithfulness**—The books of the Kings are not biographies of individual monarchs. The typical format is to introduce the king by name, provide some biographical detail and a moral assessment, summarize key events in his reign, and cite additional sources. This format makes for a highly selective reporting. The lives of the kings are used to teach that faithfulness to God's covenant is rewarded with blessing and unfaithfulness punished with the removal of blessing and, eventually, with the removal of the people from the Promised Land itself. This tale begins with the sad account of the division of the kingdom.

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p. 100
- Leadership really matters. Solomon's idolatry and compromise sadly cascaded into his successors' reigns and deeply affected the nation's future.
- Augustine: "Idolatry is worshipping anything that ought to be used, or using anything that is meant to be worshiped." Be watchful for the forms idolatry takes in our modern age.
- Serving with a humble heart actually makes one a stronger leader.
- Priority of unity in the body of Christ.

Chapter 15—God’s Messengers

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 203-217
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 101-106

Biblical text:

- 1 Kings 17-19
- 2 Kings 2, 4, 6
- Hosea 4-5, 8-9, 14
- Amos 1, 3-5, 9

Session overview—The Northern Kingdom experienced amazing prosperity even as it spiraled ever deeper into apostasy. Life was good and few troubled themselves with the consequences of their idolatry and faithlessness. A key juncture occurred when Ahaz and Jezebel introduced Baal worship into Israel. God sent his messengers, the prophets, to warn the people of their impending doom. Elijah came with the message that Baal and Asherah were no match for the Lord. Elisha demonstrated the Lord’s power to heal and restore. Amos decried Israel’s social injustices and warned them to turn away from their idolatry. Hosea, at the command of the Lord, took a woman as his wife who was continually unfaithful. His faithfulness to his adulterous wife was a graphic, real-life portrait of God’s faithful covenantal love for Israel.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Fire of the Lord and the wrath of a queen (1 Kings 17-19)***—These chapters record the early events of the ministry of Elijah culminating in the dramatic encounter between the prophet and the priests of Baal, highlighting the power of Yahweh. Elijah directly challenged the idolatrous program of Ahab and Jezebel. The importation of the Baal cult may have been linked to their foreign policy and their attempts to make Israel an international player. Elijah would have none of that. The issue was covenant faithfulness and he was calling the nation back to that. The showdown was a grand opportunity to remind Israel that there was only one, true God.
- ***Fresh fire (1 Kings 19)***—This chapter records Elijah’s funk following his dramatic victory over the priests of Baal. He feels all alone and running for his life from the murderous Jezebel. God mercifully provides Elijah and us with a reminder of the truth. First, there are others who yearn to be true to the Lord and second, that God was with him and us to strengthen and guide. God gives Elijah a partner and a successor in his ministry in the person of Elisha.
- ***Chariots of fire (2 Kings 2)***—This chapter narrates Elijah’s dramatic and unique exit from this life. Baal was known as “the Charioteer”, often portrayed with the storm clouds as his war chariot. Elijah’s ascension into heaven is yet another statement against the false religion of Baalism. Yahweh, not Baal, is God.
- ***God at work through Elisha (2 Kings 4, 6)***—These chapters capture the pith of Elisha’s ministry. Elijah worked miracles in grand confrontations with the idolatrous powers in

Israel. Elisha will work twice as many miracles, but they will fundamentally be works of compassion. The God of Elijah and Elisha commands the forces of nature and brings healing and help to his people in need.

- ***Shepherd of Tekoa (Amos 1, 3-5, 9)***—These chapters capture the emphasis of the prophetic ministry of Amos. Amos lived during a period of great prosperity for both Israel and Judah. Under Jeroboam II and Uzziah, the divided kingdoms collectively extended almost to the boundaries achieved under David and Solomon. However, Amos looks past the façade of the so-called “golden age” of his time to examine the dry rot of spiritual, social, and moral decay apparent in both Israel and Judah. Amos attacks the religious apostasy and hypocrisy, the moral and social collapse, and the political corruption of his day. He confronts both the political and social authorities and the religious establishment in calling individuals in community to covenant obedience. Amos condemns the luxury, self-indulgence, and oppression which characterized the period. Greedy Israelites who built mansions for themselves on the backs of the poor were squarely within the crosshairs of his prophetic fire. Religious devotion and faithfulness have a clear connection to social justice. If people love and obey Yahweh, not only is their worship more than empty formalism, their community life flows out in kindness and equity to the poor and oppressed. The prophet’s message of doom seemed incongruous against the backdrop of an era of prosperity, military success, and internal stability. Yet, within little more than a generation, all would be in ruins.
- ***Fire on their cities (Hosea 4-5, 8-9, 14)***— Hosea’s ministry spanned the last kings of Israel, from Jeroboam II (782-753) to Hoshea (732 to 722). His ministry began in a period where Israel enjoyed a temporary time of political and economic ascendancy, which rapidly crumbled after Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727) came to the Assyrian throne. Hosea is the death-bed prophet of Israel, writing to the Northern Kingdom, which was unknowingly on the brink of disaster. He is the last writing prophet to address the North before the Assyrian onslaught. Hosea is instructed to marry an adulterous woman, making his own marriage a vivid illustration of Israel’s covenant infidelity to Yahweh. The prophet’s personal suffering gives him insight into God’s grief over Israel’s sin as well as compassion for his people. Hosea likens the Lord’s judgment to a fire falling on the cities of the nation. The fire will spread unless they put it out immediately. The fires of judgment will burn hot with God’s anger toward the sin of the people.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, pp. 479-480.
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 103-105

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *1 Kings summary chart:*

David Appoints Solomon	Wisdom Given and Demonstrated	Temple and Palace	Covenant Promise and Warning	Solomon's Reign Described	Division of the Kingdom'	Early Kingdoms in Conflict	Ahab; Elijah & Conflict of Yahwehism vs Baalism	War with Aram	Jehoshaphat		
1	2	3	5	9	10	11	12	14	17	20	22
Consolidation		Ascendancy		Decline				Elijah's ministry			
Solomon's glory						Divided kingdoms					
United monarchy						Kingdoms of Israel & Judah					
Kingdom at peace						Kingdoms in turmoil					

Key idea: Covenant infidelity

Key verse: 11:11

Key chapter: 12

• **2 Kings summary chart:**

Judgment on Ahaziah	Elijah's translation	Joram and Moabite rebellion	Elisha's ministry to poor and oppressed	Deliverance from Aram	Jehu Extinguishes Ahab's House	Athaliah; Joash and Successors	Jeroboam II & Uzziah	Fall of Samaria	Hezekiah & Deliverance	Visitors from babylon	Mamsseh & Successor	Josiah's Reforms	Fall of Judah
1	2	3	4	6	9	11	14	17	18	20	21	22	25
Ahaziah to Hoshea								Hezekiah to Zedekiah					
Israel Exiled by Assyria								Judah Exiled by Babylon					
853-722 BC								715-586 BC					

Key idea: Covenant Infidelity

Key verses: 17:18-23

Key chapter: 17

• **Hosea summary chart:**

Prophet's marriage	Gomez/Israel parallel	Restoration of Gomez	Case against Israel	Punishment & appeal	God's faithful love
1	2	3	4	8	11
			7	10	14

Hosea's marriage: Unfaithful wife & faithful husband	Faithless Israel & faithful God
Hosea's personal crisis	Israel's national crisis

Key idea: Covenant Infidelity

Key verses: 10:1-2

Key chapter: 2

- **Amos summary chart:**

Judgment Against Nations	Judgment Against Israel & Judah	First Oracle	Second Oracle	Locust Swarm	Consuming Fire	Plumb Line	Summer Fruit	Lord at the Altar	Restoration Promises
1	2	3	4	5	7		8	9	9:11-15
Eight Prophecies Against Nations	Three Oracles Re Israel's Sin	Five Visions of Future Judgment			Five Promises for Israel's Restoration				
Pronouncement	Provocation	Prophetic Perception of Future			Promise				

Key idea: Looming judgment & call to repent

Key verses: 5:14-15

- **Introduction to the prophets**—The prophets were spokespersons for God. They spoke for Yahweh to a particular group in a particular situation. The most frequent word translated “prophet” is *nabi*. The term indicated that the prophet was one who was called. Seer is also a term used for the prophetic office, and while that term emphasized the prophet's inclination to receive revelatory visions, the prophets were not primarily predictors of the future. Their primary function was to call Israel and/or Judah to obedience and dependence upon God. Their messages were shaped by God's covenant with his people and the historical circumstances confronting them. The ministry of the biblical prophets tended to cluster around times of crisis. Four such times were primary:
 - (1) religious crisis posed by the official sponsorship of Baal worship in the time of Elijah;
 - (2) Assyrian threat resulting in the collapse of the Northern Kingdom;
 - (3) Babylonian threat resulting in the collapse of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem; and
 - (4) identity crisis of the post-exilic community.
- **Scope of prophetic ministry**--Moses is the first and the greatest of the Hebrew prophets (Num. 12:6-8). His experience is something of a paradigm for later prophets. Besides the sixteen writing prophets, Moses, Deborah, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, and Micaiah,

among others, are also counted in the prophetic ranks. See the chart below for a summary:

<i>Period</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Audience</i>	<i>Message</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Pre-monarchy	Mouthpiece; leader	People	Spiritual overseer; guidance; justice	Moses; Deborah; Samuel
Pre-classical	Mouthpiece; adviser	Kings; ruling elite	Military advice; rebuke and blessing	Nathan; Elijah; Elisha; Micaiah
Classical	Mouthpiece; social/spiritual counselor	People	Rebuke; warning of judgment; promise of restoration; call for repentance and justice	Writing prophets

- ***Elijah and Elisha***—Kings places great stress on the ministries of the non-writing prophets, Elijah and Elisha. They are linked to the later writing prophets and are the major combatants in the early struggle between Yahwehism and Baalism. Elijah’s name means “Yahweh is my God” and aptly summarizes the essence of his ministry. He leads the fight against syncretism and outright betrayal of the covenant. Both men work a number of miracles and both are involved in the politics of the era. However, Elijah generally lived apart from the people and stressed the law, judgment, and repentance. Elisha largely lived with the people and emphasized grace and hope. One ministry style emphasizes the need for people connection; the other, the need to “get into the soak” with God.
- ***Writing Prophets***—There are sixteen writing prophets in the Old Testament. See below for a summary of their identity, time, message, and context:

<i>Prophet</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Era/Nation</i>	<i>Enemy</i>	<i>Message</i>
Isaiah	740-680	Pre-exilic: Judah	Assyria	Salvation is from the Lord; God’s trustworthiness demonstrated.
Jeremiah	627-580	Pre-exilic/exilic: Judah	Assyria; Babylon	Warning of impending doom; Call to faithful dependence on the Lord.
Ezekiel	593-570	Exilic: Jews in Babylon	Babylon	Glory of the Lord; Future destruction of Jerusalem.

Daniel	605-535	Exilic: Jews in Babylon	Babylon; Persia	God as sovereign over all; Visions of the future.
Hosea	755-715	Pre-Exilic: Israel	Assyria	God's love and heartbreak pictured in the prophet's marriage.
Joel	835-800 or 580s on	Pre-exilic; Judah or Post-exilic: Jews in Palestine	Assyria or Persia	Day of the Lord (DOL)
Amos	760-750	Pre-exilic: Israel	Assyria	Judgment for idolatry and injustice.
Obadiah	840s or 580s	Pre-exilic: Edom or Post-exilic: Edom		Judgment on Edom
Jonah	760s		Assyria	Gentile salvation; God's compassion
Micah	735-700	Pre-exilic: Judah	Assyria	Israel's corruption & God's justice
Nahum	650s on		Assyria	Nineveh's destruction
Habakkuk	610-605	Pre-exilic: Judah	Babylon	Just shall live by faith; God's justice in dealing with the nations
Zephaniah	630-620	Pre-exilic: Judah	Assyria; Babylon	Day of the Lord (DOL)
Haggai	520	Post-exilic: Jews in Jerusalem	Persia	Rebuilding the Temple
Zechariah	520	Post-exilic: Jews in Jerusalem	Persia	Future blessing on God's people
Malachi	480 or later	Post-exilic: Jews in Jerusalem	Persia	Return to God

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p. 106
- Sensing and responding to the prophetic voice. Will we pick up or leave God on voicemail?
- The Church's prophetic voice to our modern culture. Pray for spiritual eyes to see God's take on the situation; courage and boldness to say so.
- Religious syncretism as a threat then and now.
- God's loyal lovingkindness exhibited in Hosea's marriage and ministry.

Text to bookmark: Amos 5:24

Chapter 16—Beginning of the End

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 219-230
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 107-112

Biblical text:

- 2 Kings 17-19
- Isaiah 3, 6, 13-14, 49, 53

Session overview—Both Israel and Judah were small nations in the midst of larger, powerful empires. To the east, lay Egypt, a power through the millennia. To the northeast, Assyria had been a bully for centuries. To the southeast, Babylon was on the rise. For smaller nations, the “logical” way to survive was to make strategic alliances with the surrounding nations. This was Israel’s course of action and what caused them to fall into idolatry. Hoshea of Israel gets caught double-crossing Assyria by allying with Egypt. Shalmaneser of Assyria moves to eliminate the Northern Kingdom. Judah is also threatened by the Assyrians (by Sennacherib, Shalmanseser’s successor) but responds differently. Hezekiah relies on the Lord and is miraculously delivered from the Assyrian horde. The lesson is one repeated over and over in the historical books of the Bible. The battle is the Lord’s. God’s people were to place their trust in him, not in the fickle princes in the ever-changing strategic alliances of international politics.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Fall of Israel (2 Kings 17)***—This chapter records how Hoshea foolishly forges a secret alliance with Egypt in an attempt to win independence from Assyria. The Assyrians attacked and destroyed Samaria, deporting the Israelites to various places in their empire. Israel had tolerated a unbroken string of idolatrous kings who had led them astray. The wealthy in their midst were content with spiritual adultery. After all, the economy was healthy and trade robust with the surrounding peoples. They were too hard-hearted to realize their own decline until it was too late.
- ***Taking a stand (2 Kings 18-19)***—These chapters chronicle the reign of Hezekiah and that king’s choice of the Lord as his ally. He takes Sennacherib’s provocative and threatening letter and spreads it out before the Lord. Like Moses and others, when faced with crisis, he fell on his face before the Lord and sought divine guidance and help. The avenging angel performs one of the most significant miracles in the Old Testament and 185,000 Assyrians were slain. The boastful Sennacherib was later assassinated by his own sons.
- ***Prophet called out (Isa. 6)***—This chapter records Isaiah’s call and commissioning to ministry. The chapter is rich with gospel truth. His vision of the heavenly throne causes his realization of his own sinfulness. God extends mercy and calls Isaiah to be his mouthpiece to a hard generation.
- ***Very bad news (Isa. 13)***—This passage records Isaiah’s prophecy against Babylon. Even though miraculously delivered, the people of Judah continued in their rebellious idolatry.

Kings like Hezekiah was short hiatuses in a long decline. Judah will be subjected to Babylon, but Babylon herself will be judged as well.

- **Very good news (Isa. 14, 49, 53)**—These chapters speak of God’s compassion on Judah and her deliverance by the Lord’s suffering servant. Despite Judah’s idolatry and infidelity, Isaiah prophesies many aspects of the wonderful deliverance by Messiah.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 480
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 109-111

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- **2 Kings summary chart:**

Judgment on Ahaziah	Elijah’s translation	Joram and Moabite rebellion	Elisha’s ministry to poor and oppressed	Deliverance from Aram	Jehu Extinguishes Ahab’s House	Athaliah; Joash and Successors	Jeroboam II & Uzziah	Fall of Samaria	Hezekiah & Deliverance	Visitors from babylon	Mamsseh & Successor	Josiah’s Reforms	Fall of Judah
1	2	3	4	6	9	11	14	17	18	20	21	22	25
Ahaziah to Hoshea									Hezekiah to Zedekiah				
Israel Exiled by Assyria									Judah Exiled by Babylon				
853-722 BC									715-586 BC				

Key idea: Covenant Infidelity

Key verses: 17:18-23

Key chapter: 17

- **Isaiah summary chart:**

Introductory Oracles	Isaiah’s Call	Ahaz’s Failure; Syro-Ephraim Coalition	Oracles Against the Nations	DOL: Deliverance of Israel	Hezekiah’s Salvation, Sickness, and Sin: End of Assyrian Crisis & Transition to Babylonian Crisis	Israel’s Deliverance	Israel’s Deliverer		
1-5	6	7	13	24	28	36-39	40	49	58

Prophecies of Condemnation	Historical Parenthesis	Prophecies of Comfort
Prophetic	Historic	Messianic
Judgment	Transition	Hope

Key idea: Salvation from the Lord

Key verses: 55:6, 73

Key chapter: 53

- **Isaiah** ministered at the end of Israel’s second greatest period of prosperity during Jeroboam II’s reign (782-753). Two major events serve as the focus of Isaiah 1-39 – the invasion of Israel by Tiglath-Pileser (Isa. 7-12) and the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib (Isa. 36-37). His ministry witnessed the rise of Assyria on the world stage, the fall of Samaria, and the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian menace in the days of Hezekiah. After Samaria’s fall, Isaiah warns Judah of judgment, not at the hands of the then dominant Assyrians, but one that would be executed by Babylon. Isaiah has been described as the “prince of prophets” because of the majestic sweep of his book and the powerful way he depicts God’s justice and redemption, culminating in great prophecies of Messiah and the messianic age. The basic theme of the book is found in the meaning of Isaiah’s name – salvation is of the Lord. His basic purpose is to demonstrate the trustworthiness of Yahweh in the vicissitudes of national and personal trials.

Takeaways:

- *Participant’s Guide*, p. 112
- God deals with disobedience, but his compassion never ends.
- God’s judgment as entailing both warning and hope.
- Jerusalem is surrounded by the world’s most powerful and fierce army and the situation looked hopeless. Hezekiah prayed and things changed. Are you facing something that looks too big and overwhelming, indeed hopeless? How can you and others in your circle pray?

Text to bookmark: 2 Kings 19:14-19; Isa. 6:6-10, 53:1 et seq.

Chapter 17—The Kingdoms' Fall

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 231-247
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 113-118

Biblical text:

- 2 Kings 21, 23-25
- 2 Chronicles 33, 36
- Jeremiah 1-2, 4-5, 13, 21; Lamentations 1-3, 5
- Ezekiel 1-2, 6-7, 36-37

Session overview—Just as in the Garden of Eden, after the days of the flood, and in the days of the judges, God's people were repeating the pattern of sin and faithlessness. The Lord had provided a good place for them but they refused to obey his guidelines and accept his direction. Once again, God cleaned house and started over again.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Even worse than before (2 Kings 21, 23, 24; 2 Chron. 33)***—These chapters describe Israel just before and at the time Jerusalem fell. The evil reigns of Manasseh, Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin are described as well as Josiah's attempts at revival. The final chapter of 2 Kings relates Zedekiah's sad decision to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem. Manasseh in particular was a truly wicked king (2 Kings 21; 2 Chron. 33). He offered his own son as a human sacrifice, built pagan altars in the Temple of the Lord, and murdered Isaiah (according to tradition, by sawing him in half). He was surrounded by, and promoted a system that actively attempted to drive the true worship of Yahweh out of Israel. Jehoiakim rivalled him in inequity. Manasseh and his successors were symptomatic of how far Judah had fallen. These chapters describe the policies and actions of desperate and faithless rulers.
- ***Against the mountains (Ezek. 1-2, 6-7)***—These chapters in Ezekiel provide a vivid perspective on God's power and rule (Ezek. 1-2) and a message of coming judgement and destruction (Ezek. 6-7). The opening chapters of Ezekiel contain imagery very similar to that of Revelation 1 and 4.
- ***Courage to confront (Jer. 1-2, 4-5, 13)***—These chapters record Jeremiah's call to ministry (Jer. 1), the warnings and exhortations he delivers to Judah (Jer. 2, 4-5, 13). Jeremiah was called to courageously confront Judah with their idolatry and to underline the terrible consequences that were coming. The weeping prophet suffered tremendously in fulfilling his demanding role.
- ***No remedy (2 Kings 25; 2 Chron. 36; Jer. 21)***—These chapters record Judah's final revolt against Nebuchadnezzar and the tragic and destruction of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem for two years. Jerusalem fell and many of the people were deported. Jeremiah laments the destruction in Lamentations.
- ***For my holy name (Ezek. 36-37)***—These chapters record Ezekiel's prophecy to the mountains of Israel and his vision of the valley of dry bones. The Lord asks whether

these bones can live. By the power and mercy of God. they most certainly can. The prophets had prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem. They were very forthright about the judgment that was coming. However, after the fall of the city and the days of judgement ran their course, these prophecies spoke of hope and restoration.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, pp. 480-481.
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 115-117

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *2 Kings summary chart:*

Judgment on Ahaziah	Elijah’s translation	Joram and Moabite rebellion	Elisha’s ministry to poor and oppressed	Deliverance from Aram	Jehu Extinguishes Ahab’s House	Athaliah; Joash and Successors	Jeroboam II & Uzziah	Fall of Samaria	Hezekiah & Deliverance	Visitors from babylon	Mamsseh & Successor	Josiah’s Reforms	Fall of Judah
1	2	3	4	6	9	11	14	17	18	20	21	22	25
Ahaziah to Hoshea									Hezekiah to Zedekiah				
Israel Exiled by Assyria									Judah Exiled by Babylon				
853-722 BC									715-586 BC				

Key idea: Covenant Infidelity
 Key verses: 17:18-23
 Key chapter: 17

For summary charts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, see Appendix B—Old Testament Segment Introductions and Charts, pp. A-36, 37.

Takeaways:

- *Participant’s Guide*, p. 118
- Listen and live.
- New covenant (Jer. 31; Ezek. 36; Heb. 8).
- God’s judgment as a severe mercy. There is never a strong and truthful bout of loving discipline from God without God’s rich grace following right behind.
- A prophetic perspective on ministry—God does not ask us to be successful (by the numbers or the world’s standards) but faithful. Let our lives be signposts to declare God’s might, presence, love, and mercy and leave the results with him.
- The next generation—Note that a number of godly leaders of Israel (Eli, Samuel, Hezekiah, Josiah) were followed by children who were not faithful to the Lord.

Texts to bookmark: Jer. 31:31-34; Lam. 3:22-23; Ezek. 36:24-28.

Chapter 18—Daniel in Exile

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 249-261
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 119-124

Biblical text:

- Dan. 1-3, 6
- Jeremiah 29-31

Session overview—Daniel was a young man from a noble Jewish family taken to Babylon in the first deportation sometime after 605 BC. The book that bears his name was written in the backdrop of the fall of Jerusalem and the deportation and exile of the Jews in Babylon to people suffering through the same circumstances as Daniel himself. Daniel serves through the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar and his successors and into the early part of the reign of Cyrus of Persia after the fall of Babylon, a ministry that spanned from around 600 to the mid-530s BC.

Daniel's challenge is ours today. How does one live faithfully in the midst of an unholy culture? Daniel and his companions resisted the bitterness of exile and servitude, and instead made themselves useful. They remained respectful and humble while "taking their stand". They were steadfast in obeying the Lord and remained hopeful. Daniel meditated on Jeremiah prophecy that in seventy years the exile would end.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Belly of the beast (Dan. 1)***—This chapter relates the experience of Daniel and his companions in the service of the Babylonian king. Daniel and his friends follow their convictions on Jewish dietary restrictions but do so in an unobtrusive way. Even though the easiest way to "make it" in the new setting was to "go along", they were determined to follow God's ways and to do so in a humble way.
- ***Dreams (Dan. 2)***—In this segment, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream in which the king is given a sweeping vision of four great empires spanning numerous centuries culminating in God's kingdom established on earth. These empires are generally understood to be the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman Empires. In Daniel's posture in assisting the king by interpreting his dream, the prophet serves the king in a way that is both humble and useful. A humble spirit can open doors to boldly present God's message.
- ***Decisions (Dan. 3)***—Perhaps 20 years separates this chapter from the previous one. This segment relates how Daniel's three friends were miraculously delivered from the fires of the furnace. This incident may have been a pre-Bethlehem appearance of the Lord himself.
- ***Message for the new king (Dan. 6)***—In this passage, Daniel is an old and respected counselor, who has been faithful but whose faith had earned him many enemies. Daniel was a witness to the truth during his entire period of service in Babylon (probably about 70 years). Here, he is miraculously delivered from the lion's den by the Lord after ending

up in that den because of his faithfulness to his Lord. A Persian ruler discovers that God alone is the King of kings.

Discussion Questions:

- *The Story*, p. 481.
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 121-123

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *Daniel summary chart:*

Training in Babylon	N’s Dream & D’s Interpretation	N’s Gold Image	N’s Pride Punished	B’s Presumption Punished	Daniel in the Lion’s Den	Four Beasts	Goat and Ram	70 Weeks	Culminating Vision & Explanation
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10-12
Daniel’s Court Experiences						Daniel’s Visions of Future			
Nebuchadnezzar				Belshazzar; Darius		Various – Persian Era			

Key idea: God’s sovereignty

Key verse: 4:25b

Key chapter: 9

- **Post-exilic prophets**—Much of the application of Daniel grows out of the post-exilic issues that confronted the Jewish people. Three different mindsets grappled with what to make of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon: (1) Yahweh has forsaken us and wants nothing to do with us; (2) Yahweh was bested by the more powerful god of the Babylonians; and (3) judgment was not God’s problem, but the people’s. Sin and covenantal unfaithfulness had brought it. Repentance and return to Yahweh was in order. The prophets hammer home the third perspective. Faithfulness to Yahweh brings favor and blessing; disobedience and apostasy brings judgment and punishment. God wasn’t kidding back there in Deuteronomy!
- **Monotheism must be embraced and its implications worked out** for worship and behavior. In addition, there was the concern of assimilation. Intermarriage and other social and commercial practices etc. threaten the identity of the Jewish people. Both idolatry (Dan. 3 & 6) and cultural compromise (Dan. 1) pose threats.

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p. 124
- The faithful prosper while the faithless fall.
- Standing firm in personal faith while fostering Christian empathy and action.
- Faithful living in the midst of an idolatrous culture. Building a supporting network.

Text to bookmark: Dan. 4:25

Chapter 19—The Return Home

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 263-273
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 125-130

Biblical text:

- Ezra 1-6
- Haggai 1-2
- Zech. 1, 8

Session overview—God leads his people back home. Israel was exiled in three stages (605, 597, and 586 BC) and returned in three stages (538, 458, and 445 BC). Ezra relates the story of first two returns from Babylon, the first led by Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1-6) and the second led by Ezra to re-establish the covenant community (Ezra 7-10). The temple was rebuilt over a period of about 20 years under Zerubbabel as governor and Joshua as priest. This is recorded in Ezra 3-6 and Haggai and Zechariah prophesied during this time. The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt over a period of 25 years, under Nehemiah as governor and Ezra as priest. Ezra provides a history of both stages, while Nehemiah records the second. Malachi prophesied during this second period. The story of Esther occurs sometime in the midst of these returns and reconstructions.

Note how pagan kings provide all the supplies needed to rebuild the temple. Israel was called to pray, worship, and work faithfully. God did the rest. God is the one who builds the house. The people faced opposition from without and apathy from within and again disobeyed God's directions. The Lord sends his prophets, the people get back to the land, and the temple gets rebuilt, albeit a shadow of its former glory.

Bible episode summaries:

- **Coming home again (Ezra 1)**—This chapter begins Ezra's recording of a return from exile and the rebuilding of the temple. This is the first return from exile occurring at the onset of Persian hegemony around 538 BC.
- **Building the temple (Ezra 3-4)**—These chapters record the initial reconstruction of the temple. There is both joy and pain at the rededication of the temple. Joy at the completion, at long last, of the people's religious center amidst great opposition. Chagrin in the memory of the old temple and how far short the new one was in comparison.
- **Priorities (Haggai 1-2; Zechariah 1, 8)**—This segment highlights the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah and their important function of encouraging the people to be faithful to the Lord in their lifestyle and practical choices. The people quickly abandon their recommitment to the Lord and return to satisfying their own needs and agendas. Haggai and Zechariah remind the people of their true priorities and spur them on in their commitments.

- *Whatever is needed (Ezra (5-6))*—After a 15-year delay and amidst significant opposition and apathy, the temple is completed in just four years. Opposition actually served as a catalyst for the work. Note the crucial importance of the support of the Persian monarch to the completion of the project.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 481.
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 127-129

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *Ezra summary chart:*

Cyrus’ Decree	Return under Sheshbazzar	Rebuilding Temple	Opposition	Delay	Completion of Temple	Artaxerxes’ Letter	Return under Ezra	Intermarriage
1		3	4		6	7	8	10
Return under Zerubbabel						Return under Ezra		
Temple Rebuilt						People Reformed		
20 + Years						1 Year		

Key idea: Return and renewal

Key verses: 1:2-3

Key chapters: 1, 10

- *Haggai summary chart:*

1—Challenge to Covenant renewal	2:1-9—Promise of restoration: Glory recalled	2:10-19—Call to holiness: Blessings of obedience	2:20-23—Davidic servant
First rebuke	First encouragement	Second rebuke	Second encouragement
September, 520	October, 520	December, 520	December, 520

Key idea: Rebuilding the temple (Covenant Renewal)

Key verse: 1:8

- *Ezra*—Ezra and Nehemiah are a single book in the Hebrew Old Testament and in the Greek Septuagint. The two were separated in the Latin Vulgate and that separation has been followed in the various English translations.
- *Post-exilic prophets*—The ministry of the biblical prophets tended to cluster around times of crisis. Four such times were primary: (1) the religious crisis posed by the official sponsorship of Baal worship in the time of Elijah; (2) & (3) the Assyrian and Babylonian

threats which resulted in the respective captivities of Samaria in the north and Judah in the south; and (4) the identity crisis of the post-exilic community. A number of the writing prophets dealt with issues that concerned the Jews in exile and the post-exilic community. The primary issues and the people's possible responses were as follows:

Issues:	Monotheism
	Leadership of priests and Levites in political vacuum
	Intermarriage
	Retribution principle made painfully plain
Possible responses:	Yahweh forsook them
	Yahweh bested by other gods
	Sin & infidelity brought judgment

- *Haggai* delivers four messages concerning the necessity to rebuild the temple and live faithful to God's covenant demands. He ministered to a discouraged and apathetic people who thought nothing they did made a difference from a religious standpoint. As a result, the returning Jews saw little reason for careful attention to Torah or to be overly concerned about the restoration of the temple and its cultic practice. The Persians saw all religions on the same level, tolerated them all (as long as there were no problems). The Jews were being gradually assimilated into this "no problema" mentality.

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p. 130
- God's grace always provides a fresh start.
- Addressing misplaced priorities. What's stopping you from a serious reassessment?
 - Your own pleasure and comfort
 - Fear of the unknown
 - Fear that it's too much work
 - Undervaluing the things God values
- Overcoming spiritual apathy. What is taking precedence over pleasing God?
- Overcoming opposition. Get right with the Lord and get back to doing what you should do.

Texts to bookmark: Ezra 7:10

Chapter 20—The Queen of Beauty and Courage

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 275-289
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 131-136

Biblical Text:

- Esther 1-9

Session overview—While God is never mentioned by name in the book of Esther, his presence, power, and protection is evident everywhere. God's sovereignty is apparent in the arrangement of events in the book. Equally apparent is that he uses people to accomplish his purposes. Esther's elevation to royalty was no accident and she needed to be courageous in her position for God to save her people. God's justice is on display as well. Haman is the archetypal bad guy—proud, cruel, diabolical, and ruthless. At the conclusion of the story, he meets his end in the way he intended for God's people.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Finding a queen (Esther 1-2)***—These chapters relate how Vashti was deposed as queen and how Esther was chosen to replace her. In the opulent Persian court, an extravagant process is utilized in making that choice. This process may have occurred while Xerxes was on his grand campaign against Greece which ended in decisive defeat. Upon the king's return home, Esther is chosen as the new queen and is swept up into a privileged world of intrigue.
- ***Two of the King's men (Esther 2-4)***—These chapters relate incidents that highlight the respective characters of Mordecai and Haman. The contrast between the two men could not be clearer. Mordecai is a humble man, using his position to protect the king. Haman is a proud man, who is all about Haman. His own advancement is the focal interest and he fully utilizes his power to settle petty disputes in a vindictively cruel manner.
- ***Risky move (Esther 5)***—This chapter relates Esther's bold and risky request of Xerxes to attend her banquet. Access to the Persian kings was very restrictive. Even the queen needed permission. Esther risks everything just asking to speak in her husband's presence.
- ***Skewered (Esther 6-7)***—These chapters relate the King's sleepless night, his discovery of Mordecai's service and his order that Haman honor Mordecai, Esther's second banquet, the uncovering of Haman's plot, and Haman's execution. Throughout the narrative, Haman finds himself in increasingly frustrating positions before he finally meets the doom he had planned for Mordecai. Haman's adversary was none other than the Lord God whom he dishonored by his pride and cruel vindictiveness..
- ***Tables turned (Esther 8-10)***—These chapters relate the rescue of the Jewish nation from Haman's murderous plot. The Jews memorialized this deliverance from in the Feast of Purim.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 482.
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 133-135

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *Esther summary chart:*

Vashti Deposed	Esther Elevated	Mordecai Uncovers Plot	Haman’s Plot to Destroy the Jews	Mordecai Persuades Esther to Help	Esther’s First Banquet Mordecai Honored	Esther’s Second Banquet: Haman	Xerxes’ Edict in Favor of the Jews	Jews Triumph Over Their Enemies	Feat of Purim
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Esther as Queen		Haman’s Plot			Esther’s Foil		Jewish Triumph		
Threat to the Jews					Deliverance of the Jews				

Key idea: Providential deliverance

Key verse: 4:14

Key chapter: 7

- **Providence** The purpose of Esther is to show that God can accomplish His purposes as easily through “coincidences” as he can through grand miracles of deliverance. Esther “happens” to be chosen queen; Mordecai “happens” to foil an assassination plot; the king “happens” to have insomnia and “happens” to open the pages of a dry administrative record to the account of how Mordecai uncovered the plot; this “happens” to occur just as Haman shows up to seek his revenge on the Jews; Haman’s pride “happens” to play into Mordecai’s honor, etc. etc. God is firmly in control of the tide of time and is determined to keep His covenant promises to His people.
- **Purim** The Feast of Purim marks the deliverance recorded in Esther.

Takeaways:

- *Participant’s Guide*, p. 136
- Being an instrument in the hands of God.
- Providence vs. happenstance.
- Courage to stand up for what is right; wisdom to know how and when to do that.
- Have you had Mordecai types in your life? Thank God for that person’s influence and tell someone else about it.

Chapter 21—Rebuilding the Walls

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 291-304
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 137-142

Biblical text:

- Ezra 7
- Neh. 1-2, 4, 6-8
- Mal. 1-4

Session overview—We witness many spiritual lessons in the story of the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem. We see God's sovereign rule at work, how the Word of God is so integral to revival, and how God's purposes are accomplished through the hard work of prayer, the sweat of faithful labor, and the courage to stand and fight. The political leadership of Zerubbabel and the prophetic voices of Haggai and Zechariah had encouraged the Jews returning from exile to rebuild the temple. Then, Ezra and Nehemiah encourage the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and provide them a secure refuge in the land. At the heart of this work is preaching and prayer. Ezra calls the people to biblically faithful living. Malachi challenges them not to be satisfied with half-measures.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Sent on a mission (Ezra 7; Neh. 1-2)***—This segment records how the Lord called Nehemiah back to Palestine to complement the spiritual leadership of Ezra in his people's dire situation. Nehemiah served as a royal official of King Artaxerxes I. The favor he received may have been due in part to the fact that Artaxerxes' stepmother was Esther. Esther almost certainly outlived Xerxes, who died 13 years after the events recorded in the book of Esther. She undoubtedly would have continued to be an influence at court well into the reign of Artaxerxes I.
- ***Opposition again (Neh. 4, 6)***—These chapters record the opposition Nehemiah encountered in attempting to complete the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem. Peoples who had been driven out of the land centuries before, Moabites, Ammonites, Ashdodites, and Samaritans, continued to halt and disrupt any progress on constructing Jerusalem's walls. However, under Nehemiah's determined leadership, the Jews finished the project in a mere 52 days.
- ***Reformation (Neh. 7-8; Mal. 1-4)***—This segment records the reformation among the Jewish people that occurred at this time. It was good to finish the walls and begin to repopulate the city. However, unless the people reformed their ways, they would inevitably fall into the same patterns that had led to their exile. Malachi, whose ministry overlapped that of Ezra and Nehemiah, confronted the people set adrift in a sea of spiritual compromise. First, the people were showing contempt for the ritual sacrificial requirements. Second, the people were intermarrying with their pagan neighbors in

violation of the Law. Third, the people were showing a lack of faith in the area of their finances.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, pp. 482
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 139-141

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *Nehemiah summary chart:*

Nehemiah’s Return	Inspection of the Walls	Building Begins	Opposition	Completion of the Walls	Resettlement	Reading the Law	Covenant Renewal	Resettlement	Dedicating the Wall
1	2	3	4	6	7	8		11	13
Reconstruction of the Wall						Renewal Among the People			
Political Renewal						Spiritual Renewal			

Key idea: Rebuilding wall/community

Key verses: 6:15-16

Key chapters: 1, 13

- *Malachi summary chart:*

1:1—God’s covenant love	1:6—Worship & unfaithful priests	2:10—Worship & faithless offerings	2:17—God’s justice & judgment	3:7—Returning to God; tithing	3:13—Returning to God; obeying
How have you loved us?	How have we shown you contempt?	Why not accept our offerings?	Where is the God of justice?	How have we robbed you?	How have we spoken against you?
Privilege	Pollution			Promise	

Key idea: Purification

Key verse(s): 3:1-3

- *Nehemiah* focuses on the events surrounding the third return from exile led by Nehemiah in 445 or 444 BC. This book divides into two sections: the reconstruction of the wall around Jerusalem (Neh. 1-7) and the spiritual restoration of the postexilic Jewish community in Jerusalem (Neh. 8-13). Ezra is the priest, primarily concerned with religious restoration. Nehemiah is the political administrator concerned with Judah’s political and societal renewal.

- **Malachi**—Disillusioned, doubting, and discouraged, the Jewish people questioned God’s covenant promises and wondered if it was worth serving God. The apathy and disillusionment that delayed the restoration of the temple, continued after its reconstruction. The ministries of the postexilic prophets seemed to have little impact on the people (see Ezra 9:1-4; Neh. 5:1-8, 11:1-3). These attitudes manifested themselves in empty ritual, cheating on tithes and offerings, and indifference to the moral and ceremonial law. Using a question and answer approach, Malachi probes the people for hypocrisy, infidelity, mixed marriages, divorce, false worship, and arrogance.

Takeaways:

- *Participant’s Guide*, p. 142
- God preserves a faithful remnant.
- Stewardship and biblical giving.
- Spiritual discouragement—causes and cures.
- Nehemiah as a paradigm of a good leader
 - Leaves his or her comfort zone for the greater cause
 - Gets a realistic assessment of the situation before acting
 - Takes action, avoiding needless delay
 - Develops discernment
 - Encourages others
 - Shows compassion for those they lead by setting an example of selfless servanthood
 - Works hard
 - Demonstrates personal integrity and refuses to tolerate injustice
 - Prays over everything
- Four prophetic themes are repeated over and over: refocus on God; re-center on his will; remember who he is; and rebuild our relationship with him.

Text to bookmark: Mal. 3:8-12

Chapter 22—The Birth of the King

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 309-316
- *Participant's Guide*, pp.143-148

Biblical text:

- Matt. 1-2
- Luke 1-2
- John 1

Session Overview—These chapters in the Gospel accounts record the birth of Jesus Christ. Matthew and Luke record events around the birth of the Lord and his early life from slightly different perspectives. John's first chapter elaborates upon the significance of the Incarnation. The truth that the eternal God in the person of Jesus entered into time and space and was born as a human being, lies at the heart of Christianity. Other faiths welcome moral teachers and perhaps angelic messengers; Christianity focuses on and worships the God-man. This revelation goes to the heart of the unique claims that Christianity makes.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***The Word (John 1)***—This chapter contains John's prologue which relates the theological significance of the birth of the God-man and then goes on to describe the beginnings of Jesus' ministry. John identifies Jesus as the Word of God, who was God and was eternally with God. His point is clear. God has himself entered the story of redemption as a human being. Something happened that has never happened before or since.
- ***According to your word (Luke 1)***—This chapter relates the angelic visit to Mary foretelling Jesus' miraculous birth and records, Mary's response to God in the Magnificat (1:46-56), and a most incredible set of circumstances. Mary proved a model of courageous faith. Her response was a willing submission to God's plan, which must have struck her as stunningly mysterious.
- ***Committed (Matt. 1)***—This chapter moves immediately to the birth of Jesus Christ after relating his genealogy. The focus quickly turns to Joseph, who was on the horns of a dilemma. He wanted to obey the Lord and do the honorable thing—walk away from the engagement without making a big fuss. Then he gets a heavenly visitation and discovers that his bride-to-be was telling the stunning truth. Joseph, like Mary, responds faithfully without knowing where this thing was going.
- ***Bethlehem (Luke 2)***—This chapter records the events of Christ's birth and is common lectionary fare in the Christmas season. God moves earthly rulers to fulfill prophecy. Emperor Augustus calls for a census and requires everyone to register in their home towns. The call brought Joseph, with his very pregnant wife, Mary, to Bethlehem, the town prophesied as the birthplace of Messiah many centuries earlier by the prophet Micah.

- **Movements (Matt. 2)**—This chapter records the visit of the Magi, the murderous intentions of King Herod, and the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt, and their return to Nazareth. The prophets had clearly foretold that God was going to bring people from all nations into his covenant family. Matthew picks up on this theme highlighting the visit of the Magi around the time of the Lord’s birth. God’s redemptive plan extends to every branch of humanity. Joseph once again proves faithful and is used of God to save his family from the wrath of a wicked king.
- **His Father’s house (Luke 2)**—This segment records the Holy Family’s visit to Jerusalem when Jesus was 12, the only information we have of that period of his life. The Gospel writers arrange the story of Jesus with an eye to the theological significance of his life. They make no effort to document his childhood but do relate this incident revealing that Jesus had a theologically advanced mind and early on knew who his real father was.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 483.
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp.145-147

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- **Matthew summary chart:** Perhaps the most frequently proposed structure for Matthew relates to the gospel’s five major discourses and links them to the surrounding narrative. These discourses include:
 - Sermon on the mount (5:1-7:27);
 - Instructions to the disciples (10:5-42);
 - Parables of the kingdom (13:1-52);
 - Terms of discipleship (18:1-35);
 - Olivet discourse (24:1-25:46).

Some have identified the “five books in Matthew” based on this proposed structure:

Preamble	Chs. 1-2	
Book 1	Chs. 3-7	Chs. 3-4—narrative Chs. 5-7—discourse on discipleship
Book 2	Chs. 8-10	Chs. 8-9—narrative Ch. 10—discourse on apostleship
Book 3	Chs. 11-13	Chs. 11-12—narrative Chs. 13—discourse in hiding revelation
Book 4	Chs. 14-18	Chs. 14-17—narrative Ch. 18—discourse on church administration
Book 5	Chs. 19-25	Chs. 19-22—narrative

		Chs. 23-25—discourse on judgment
Epilogue	Chs. 26-28	

I prefer a thematic approach as follows:

Birth and Early Childhood: Perfect Israelite Dedication & Preparation	Disciples Called Teaching & Ethics of the Kingdom Kingdom Authority Demonstrated Kingdom Authority Challenged Parables of the Kingdom Rejection and Warning	Cost of Citizenship in the Kingdom Privileges & Responsibilities in the Kingdom Disobedient Rulers Exposed & Rejected Return of the King Passion, Death, & Resurrection
1 3	4 5 8 11 13 14	16 18 21 24 26-28
King's Preparation & Presentment	King's Identity Revealed	King's Mission Unfolds
Bethlehem & Nazareth	Galilee	Judea & Jerusalem

Key idea: Kingdom

Key verse(s): 4:14-17; 28:18-20

Key chapter: 16

- **Mark summary chart:**

Forerunner; baptism; temptation First disciples; miracles Capernaum; Sabbath controversy Twelve selected Parables; more miracles Unbelief; apostolic tours; Herod Withdrawals from Galilee Phoenicia; Decapolis Caesarea Philippi	To Jerusalem: Struggle of Self-Denial Divorce; Rich young ruler Greatness in kingdom Triumphant entry; temple cleansed; controversy Olivet discourse Betrayal and Arrest Trial Crucifixion and Burial
1 2 3 4-5 6 7 8	8 10 11-12 13 14 15-16

Service & Power: Implications for Identity	Sacrifice & Suffering: Implications for Submission
Galilee & Perea	Judah & Jerusalem

Key idea: Servant of God

Key verse(s): 10:45

Key chapter: 8

- **Luke summary chart:**

Preface; Preparation for Ministry 1:1	Jesus' Ministry in Galilee 4:14	Jesus' Ministry While Journeying to Jerusalem (Luke's Travelogue) (See 9:51; 13:22; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28) 9:51	Passion Week: Death, Resurrection, and Ascension Of Jesus 19:28
Introduction	Early Ministry	Growing Opposition	Death & Resurrection
Preparation	Galilee	Judea	Jerusalem
Miracles Prominent		Teaching Prominent	

Key idea: Son of Man bringing salvation

Key verse: 19:10

- **John summary chart:**

Father Explained	First Disciples Cana: Water to Wine Judea: Temple Cleansing; Nicodemus Samaria: Woman at Well Cana Again: Nobleman's Son At Jerusalem: Jesus' Claims In Galilee: Bread of Heaven At Jerusalem: Light of World; Good	Foot-Washing Betrayal/Denial Predicted Farewell Discourse	Judas Betrays Jesus Ecclesiastical Trial Civil Trial: Pilate Crucifixion & Burial Commissioning of Disciples
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1	1 2 3 4	5 6 7 11 12	13 14 17	18 19 20	21
Pro- logue	Revelation of God to World			Further Revelation To Disciples	Death and Resurrection

Key idea: Belief

Key verse(s): 20:30-31

- *Gospels chart:*

<i>Gospels</i>	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Luke</i>	<i>John</i>
Date	60s	Late 50s or early 60s	60s	Late 80s or early 90s
Place	Syrian Antioch or Palestine	Rome	Rome or Caesarea	Ephesus
Audience	Jews in Syria or Palestine	Pagan Romans	Theophilus types -- Roman officials; cultured unbelievers	2 nd generation Christians and/or non- Christians
Focus on Christ	Messiah-King, Son of David	Servant of Yahweh	Son of Man; compassionate, ideal man	Son of God

- *Contrasts Between Synoptics and John*

Synoptics	John
Chiefly covers Galilean ministry	More coverage to Judean ministry
Kingdom emphasis	More emphasis on the person of Christ
Jesus as Son of David; Son of Man	Jesus as Son of God
Earthly story	Heavenly meaning
Gospels for those new in faith; first generation	Gospel of maturing church; subsequent generation
Jesus' sayings short, pithy (Matthew's five discourses an exception)	More long discourses of Jesus
Little commentary by evangelists	Much commentary by John
One Passover mentioned	Three, perhaps four, Passovers mentioned

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p.148
- The Word made flesh. Christianity's claims relate directly to the unique identity and redemptive work of Jesus Christ.
- Jesus as Immanuel, God with us.
- Assessment of Mary as a woman of faith adjusted.

Texts to bookmark: Luke 2:1-20; John 1:1-18

Chapter 23—Jesus' Ministry Begins

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 321-334
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 149-154

Biblical text:

- Matt. 3-4, 11
- Mark 1-3
- Luke 8
- John 1-4

Session overview—This session weaves the accounts of Jesus' early ministry together. Each of the four evangelists make their distinctive contribution. Matthew emphasizes Jesus as king; Mark, Jesus as servant; Luke emphasizes Jesus' humanity; and John his divinity. As the story unfolds, we see that Jesus' ministry was announced and endorsed by John the Baptist. The four accounts emphasize not only the Lord's message, miracles, and atoning death, but also how he lived in accordance with God's will. The miracles are recorded to authenticate Jesus' message. Tellingly, the primary opposition to the Lord's ministry came from the religious leaders of the day.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***John and Jesus (Matt. 3; John 1-2)***—This segment, in part, highlights the message and ministry of John the Baptist. His work as the forerunner of the Lord is emphasized, identifying Jesus as the lamb of God. In addition, John's gospel records the Baptist directing some of Jesus' first disciples to the Lord.
- ***Tempted (Matt. 4)***—This chapter records the temptation of Jesus prior to his ministry, the launch of his public ministry, his message of repentance for the kingdom was at hand, and the calling of the first disciples. Hebrews 4:14-16 reminds us of the Lord's high priestly ministry as our advocate before the Father, which serves as the basis of our confidence to approach the throne of God to receive mercy and grace in time of need.
- ***Inside story (John 3-4)***—This segment of John records two very different and most instructive interviews. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a respected religious leader and member of the Sanhedrin. He was the ultimate insider. The Samaritan woman was a despised woman of a mongrel race, a pass-around-Pat, jaunty, saucy, and sassy. Nicodemus sought Jesus out, but only late at night to preserve his reputation. Jesus waited patiently at the well during the heat of the day for a divine appointment with the Samaritan woman who bore the shame of her lifestyle. In both interviews, Jesus spoke candidly of who he was. Right at the start of John's gospel, it is clear that it does not matter if you are on top or on the bottom of the social, religious, or economic order. Jesus is the only way to life.
- ***Power (Matt. 4; Mark 1-3)***—These chapters record early events of the Lord's ministry, including various works of power. One is struck with how the miracles are interwoven

with and authenticate the message of Jesus. He preached and healed. The miracles are the occasion for preaching, with their focus on the redemptive activity of God. They are signposts of the kingdom and beg explanation. They are hints of a glorious future that will only fully arrive when the Lord returns to make all things new.

- ***Disciples (Matt. 11; Mark 3; Luke 8)***—These chapters capture a portion of the Lord’s Galilean ministry. They provide a snapshot of some of the Lord’s teaching episodes. Throughout his public ministry, Jesus was teaching on two levels. He ministered to various crowds and individuals, but was also always teaching his inner circles of disciples.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 483.
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 151-153

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- ***For Gospels segment introduction and summary charts***, see Appendix B, New Testament Segment Introductions and Charts, pp. B-9 et seq. and pp. 90-93.
- ***Miracles***—We live in the aftermath of the secular skepticism launched by the Enlightenment. Scholars have labored tediously to demythologize the gospel accounts. The miraculous elements of the accounts are said to reflect a prescientific worldview of the authors and should (indeed must) be discarded if we are to reclaim Jesus’ real message of love and peace. The Scripture asserts that God can, did, and does the miraculous throughout time, all the while normally operating along the lines he established in the natural order. Two additional ideas help flesh out a biblical understanding of miracle. First, the accounts of the miracles are phenomenological. That is, the accounts describe the event the way it appeared to the regular person. The accounts are not scientific statements. Second, the concept of miracle is that of an event which runs counter to the observed processes of nature. That is, what is known of nature. So, in the accounts of the miracles, what occurred appeared to be counter to the regularly observed processes of nature. This understanding acknowledges that human knowledge of nature (ours now and that of earlier generations) is and was a limited one.

Takeaways:

- *Participant’s Guide*, p. 154
- Jesus, the Messiah you would never expect.
- The presence and identity of the king authenticated by the power exercised by the king.
- Jesus isn’t a “respector of persons”; he is the Savior of all types of people.

Text to bookmark: John 3:3-8

Chapter 24—No Ordinary Man

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 335-351
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 155-160

Biblical text:

- Matt. 5-7, 9, 14
- Mark 4-6
- Luke 10, 15
- John 6

Session overview—These chapters provide yet another snapshot of Jesus' claims, message, and ministry. The Lord's ministry was composed of several different but complementary elements. He was always preaching, and his messages were frequently communicated through parables. These stories were, in part, simple illustrations designed to make his teaching more understandable to his audience. However, they were more than that. Sometimes they were designed to conceal the truth from those who were not seeking the truth but for excuses for not heeding it. His ministry was also infused with miracles, which confirmed his message and served as signposts for the future God's full and final redemption will bring. In addition, the miracles were testimonies to Jesus' real identity. Throughout his public ministry, Jesus' relationship with inner core of disciples is focal. The training of the twelve forms the centerpiece of his ministry. He was preparing them to "catch" his life and pass it on to others.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Parables (Mark 4; Luke 10, 15)***—Welcome to the parables. Modern audiences value clear, transparent communication where the speaker's meaning is immediately apparent to the audience. A good speaker takes pains and much preparation time to craft his or her message to make it easy for the intended audience to follow from opening to close. Jesus' sermons were plainly spoken, but not always obvious. The stories are often quite nuanced and not crafted for the casual listener. He preached "lean forward in your seats" types of messages, which were not always easy to understand. He did this to sift the true listeners from the casual critics. Those critics, who lacked true interest in what the Lord was saying and the humility needed to truly listen, often completely missed or summarily dismissed the point the Lord was making.
- ***Life in the kingdom (Matt. 5-7)***—These chapters summarize Jesus' message of the kingdom. The teaching is so high and pure that no one could consistently live like that. The message points to the need of his redemptive ministry. We must attempt to follow his example, to be sure, but when we do, we increasingly realize our need for mercy and grace all along the way and the necessity of displaying that same mercy and grace to others along the journey.
- ***To the other side (Mark 4-5)***—This segment records incidents where Jesus demonstrated power over the forces of chaos in our world. The stories of Jesus calming the sea and of

the healing the Gerasene demoniac make this point. In particular, the incident of calming the sea raised in the disciples' minds the crucial question of Jesus' identity. Who is this guy anyway? You sense their amazement and bewilderment as Jesus continues to invite them to connect the dots.

- ***Two ways to rule (Matt. 9; Mark 5-6)***—This segment focuses on the contrast between the exercise of worldly and spiritual power. In these encounters, the text contrasts Herod Antipas with the Lord. Herod takes what he wants, rubs elbows with all the right people, and follows his whims in proud displays of his power. The Lord survives on the generosity of others and makes his place with the lowly. His power is used compassionately to bring healing and wholeness to others.
- ***It is I (Matt. 14)***—This segment focuses on Jesus walking on water. The disciples think it's a ghost, but the Lord reassures them that it is indeed Jesus himself. The encounter again emphasizes the Lord's divinity. The phrase "It is I" is an allusion to the divine name revealed to Moses at the burning bush.
- ***Bread of Life (John 6)***—This chapter records two great miracles of the Lord (the feeding of the 5,000 and the Lord walking on water) before concluding with the Lord's Bread of Life discourse. That discourse contains some shocking and revealing claims by the Jesus—that faith he elicited was both in his person and in what he taught; that he claimed to be that which alone could satisfy spiritual hunger; and, most shocking of all, his claim that only by consuming his flesh and blood could one have life at all.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 484.
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 157-159

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- **For Gospels segment introduction and summary charts**, see Appendix B, New Testament Segment Introductions and Charts, pp. B-9 et seq. and pp. 90-93.

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p. 160
- No neutrality—Jesus demands a response.
- Jesus' identity is foundational to his message.
- Spiritual truth is best learned in the natural flow of life. Reflect on the training of the twelve in light of that statement.
- Jesus is sovereign over all things—supernatural powers, natural forces, sickness and death, and "serendipities" of events.

Texts to bookmark: Matt, 5:17-48; John 6:35ff.

Chapter 25—Jesus, the Son of God

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 353-366
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 161-166

Biblical text:

- Matt. 17, 21
- Mark 8-12, 14
- Luke 9, 22
- John 7-8, 11-12

Session overview—Each of the gospels convey information about what Jesus said and did. However, their central point is to bring the reader to grips with who Jesus is. As Jesus moved closer to the cross, the question as to his identity takes on greater urgency. The crowds are asking whether Jesus is the Christ. Statements like the one he made in John 8:58, “Before Abraham was, I am”, sounded like the Lord was claiming the historic name for God as his own.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Son confessed and revealed (Matt. 17; Mark 8-9; Luke 9)***— This segment records more miracles as well as the Transfiguration. Just prior to the Transfiguration, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ. This confession marks a significant breakthrough. For the first time, God’s Messiah was recognized for who he is. Still, the disciples were far from grasping the full implications of this. The Old Testament prophecies contained two strains, one speaking of a suffering servant and the other of a triumphant ruler. Jesus’ identity is confirmed by the Father on the mountaintop where the Son was transfigured. Peter, James, and John looked on as the Lord conversed with Moses and Elijah. It would have been nice to be able to take notes on that conversation!
- ***Radical claims & dangerous opposition (John 7-8, 11)***—These chapters in John record Jesus’ teaching at the Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem and his Light of the World discourse which culminated in his statement in John 8:58, which the Jews clearly understood as a claim to deity. The crowd immediately reacts by beginning to stone him. Jesus’ authority claims were augmented by the power and authority he demonstrated over death, disease, and demonic forces, particularly in the miracle of the raising of Lazarus (John 11).
- ***Matter of faith (Mark 10; John 11)***—This segment record the incident where the rich young man is challenged to trust the Lord rather than his wealth. Many of us struggle with similar issues. We lack an understanding of our true needs and we struggle with changing from a reliance on our own self-sufficiency and beginning a radical dependence on the Lord.
- ***Coming to a head (Matt. 21; Mark 11-12; Luke 22; John 12)***—This segment focuses on the Lord cleansing the temple. The Lord is implicitly claiming authority to clean up a situation that had been terribly compromised. This implicit claim and his right to make this assessment were intolerable to the Jewish religious authorities.

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *For Gospels segment introduction and summary charts*, see Appendix B, New Testament Segment Introductions and Charts, pp. B-9 et seq. and pp. 90-93.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 484
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 163-165

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p. 166
- Here is the great “I am.” C.S. Lewis aptly summarized the basic choice: “You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.”

Chapter 26—The Hour of Darkness

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 367-380
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 167-172

Biblical text:

- Matt. 26-27
- Mark 14-15
- Luke 22-23
- John 13-14, 16-19

Session overview—John had announced him as the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. Jesus himself had repeatedly spoke of his upcoming suffering and death. Yet the disciples were anticipating a golden crown, not a mass of thorns. Key to the passion accounts is the reality that Jesus went willingly to the cross. Today, it is fashionable to portray Jesus as a victim of social injustice under the thumb of Rome. Sometimes his suffering and death is characterized as divine identification with victims of injustice everywhere. There is truth there, but it falls short of the full picture. Jesus was suffering under the wrath and punishment of God for human sin. He identified with disobedience and rebellion against God everywhere and for all time and paid the penalty for sin. Jesus drank the cup of our judgment that we might reap the reward of his righteousness. 2 Cor. 5:24 states: “He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might be the righteousness of God in him.”

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Last Passover (Mark 14; John 13)***—The sequence of events at the Last Supper:
 - (1) Jesus washed the disciples' feet;
 - (2) Jesus announced he will be betrayed;
 - (3) Jesus dismisses Judas;
 - (4) Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper.
- ***I have overcome the world (Matt. 26; John 14, 16-17)***—This segment relates that Jesus knew that judgment would not only fall on him, but that his act of self-sacrifice would once and for all defeat the work of the evil one.
- ***In the Garden (Matt. 26; Luke 22; John 18)***—This segment records the agony in the Garden.
- ***Trial (Matt. 26-27; Luke 22; John 18-19)***—This segment records the various accounts of Jesus' trial. The trial followed the following sequence:
 - (1) Brought before Annas (John 18:12-14);
 - (2) Brought to Caiaphas' house (Matt. 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54-65; John 18:24);
 - (3) Sentence ratified by Sanhedrin early the next morning (Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71);

- (4) Brought before Pilate (Matt. 27:2, 11-14; Mark 15:2-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-40);
- (5) Sent to Herod by Pilate (Luke 23:6-12);
- (6) Sent back to Pilate, sentenced, and handed over to be crucified (Matt. 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:28-19:16).

This was a highly irregular trial. It was conducted illegally at night; Jesus had no opportunity to present witnesses in his defense; the prosecution's witnesses presented conflicting accounts; the High priest interrogated him directly; the sentence was pronounced without the customary period of delay for reflection.

- ***Jesus wears the Father's crown (Matt. 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19)***—This segment records Jesus' crucifixion. Crucifixion was a cruel way to execute criminals. It sadistically balanced excruciating agony with maximum longevity, forcing the victim to spend as much time in conscious torment as possible. This was done in a public setting to drive the point home to everyone—stay in line, or else. It is important to remember that Jesus was not a helpless victim here. He could have summoned overwhelming force to deliver him at any time, but did not.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 485
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 169-171

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *For Gospels segment introduction and summary charts*, see Appendix B, New Testament Segment Introductions and Charts, pp. B-9 et seq. and pp. 90-93.

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p. 172
- The cross of Christ—"it is finished" versus "he is finished".
- Our identity in Christ; our identifying with Christ.
- Covenant structure culminating in and underlining the crucial importance of the life, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 27—The Resurrection

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 381-388
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 173-178

Biblical text:

- Matt. 27-28
- Mark 16
- Luke 24
- John 19-21

Session overview—The importance of Christ's resurrection is underlined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. If there is no resurrection from the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. If Christ has been raised, Paul bluntly assesses the preaching of the gospel and Christian faith itself as useless. Indeed, we would be false witnesses.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Into the Tomb (Matt. 27; John 19)***—The evangelists take great pains to emphasize that Jesus was really dead.
- ***Resurrection (Mark 16; John 20)***—These chapters present a strong set of proofs that Jesus actually rose from the dead, including
 - (1) The tomb was empty;
 - (2) The body was missing;
 - (3) The Lord appeared to many different people at many different times and places. Indeed, one of those appearances was to over 500 people at one time and location;
 - (4) The Lord changed many lives, starting with the disciples. How did these regular, uncourageous men become the courageous preachers of a new faith that turned the world upside down in the course of a few months is a very difficult query for the faithless, sneering skeptics.
- ***Questions and answers (Luke 24)***—This segment records two important themes are emphasized in the stories in Luke 24—the road to Emmaus and the tale of Thomas' doubts. First, it is the Holy Spirit who must open our eyes to believe in Jesus. Second, the Lord's words to Thomas—"blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"—are not an endorsement of blind faith. Rather, it is a commendation of those accepting the promise of God's Word and the testimony of his appointed witnesses.
- ***Restored and commissioned (Matt. 28; John 21)***—These chapters record Jesus' restoration of Peter, which should bring hope to us all. Peter had denied the Lord but the Lord did not deny him. Jesus restored him to service and gave him a mission to fulfill. Like Peter, we are called to fulfill our missions, despite our failures and sins.

Additional, charts, notes, and observations:

- *For Gospels segment introduction and summary charts*, see Appendix B, New Testament Segment Introductions and Charts, pp. B-9 et seq. and pp. 90-93.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 485
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 175-177

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 178.
- He is risen indeed. The centrality of the resurrection to Christian faith.
- Apologetic preparation—the role of naturalistic presuppositions in dismissing the possibility of the miraculous.

Texts to bookmark: Luke 24:30-32; John 21:15-19; 1 Cor. 15:12-19

Chapter 28—New Beginnings

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 389-405
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 179-185

Biblical text:

- Acts 1-10, 12

Session overview— Acts is the bridge book between the gospels and the epistles. It traces the preaching of the gospel and the Church's rapid expansion in Jerusalem (chapters 1-7), in all Judea and Samaria (chapters 8-12), and to the ends of the ancient Mediterranean world (chapters 13-28). The book begins by describing the early ministry of the apostles before tracking Paul's missionary journeys up to his imprisonment in Rome. Acts supplies the Bible student with the necessary historical, cultural, and geographical grid for understanding the more doctrinally-oriented epistles that follows. It also reveals to us the pattern of church life in between Christ's advents: its power, its objective, its methods, its essential organization and discipline, and its driving vision.

Acts derives its name from the Greek word *praxeis*, commonly used in Greek literature to summarize the accomplishments of outstanding people. The reader is caught up with the irony of the Christian dynamic immediately. How did these followers of Jesus, who were obscure Galileans and Judeans, become people who turned the world upside down (17:6)? What changed these timid men from those who denied their Lord and abandoned Him in His hour of need into bold, stalwart apologists for the new faith? How did preachers who were confessedly "unlearned and ignorant men" (4:13) make such an impact on the world that they ushered in an entirely new culture that reshaped the face of Western civilization? Clearly, Luke records the acts of the Spirit of Christ working in and through these people. They were merely "jars of clay" (2 Cor 4:7) abandoned to God's person, purpose, and program, in and through whom God's work was done and His glory revealed (2 Cor 3:17-18).

Bible episode summaries:

- **Final lessons (Acts 1)**—This chapter records the 40 day period Jesus spent with his disciples after his resurrection, showing them how the Old Testament Scriptures were really all about him.
- **Fire (Acts 2-5)**—This segment relates how fire fell upon the early disciples at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came upon them, filling them, and empowering them for effective service. The early chapters of Acts give us a picture of what it looks like when God comes to live with and in human beings.
- **Martyrs and missionaries (Acts 6-8)**—This segment relates to the first Christian martyrdom and its aftermath. The Greek word *marturos* means both martyr and

missionary. Acts 6 records the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, Rather than stifling the witness of the early church, it spurred them onto further mission.

- **The voice (Acts 9)**—This chapter records the conversion of Paul. God chose an unlikely candidate to accomplish unprecedented works for the kingdom. God uses the “Jew’s Jew” to expand his family to the various nations of the ancient world. Paul was halted in his persecution of believers by a heavenly voice and Ananias was instructed by that same heavenly voice to welcome Saul into his home. Saul is transformed in a few days from hating Christians to a deep and sincere love of Christ and his church.
- **What God made clean (Acts 10)**—This chapter records the incident of Peter and Cornelius. Peter is instructed to go and preach to a Roman centurion and his household. Their conversion begins one of the greatest movements in history, the movement of the gospel to all the nations.
- **Hammer falls (Acts 12)**—This chapter relates the fate of Herod Agrippa. Herod lowers the boom at James and a number of Christians in an attempt to please the Jews. Little did he know that the divine boom was soon to be lowered on this blasphemous king who accepted the flattery of sycophants and failed to honor the true God.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 486
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 181-184

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *Acts summary chart:*

Preparation for Witness Pentecost	Lame Man at Temple Ananias & Sapphira Arrest/Interrogation of Apostles; First Deacons Stephen’s Defense	Philip in Samaria Paul’s Conversion Peter Along the Coast Peter and Cornelius Herod’s Persecution	1st Missionary J; ourney Jerusalem Council; 2d Missionary Journey 3d Missionary Journey Ephesus Relief Mission to Jerusalem	Arrest & Initial Defense Before Sanhedrin Before Felix Before Festus & Agrippa Journey to Rome Before the Jews at Rome
1 2	3 5 6 7	8:3 9 9:32 10 12	13 15 18 19 20	21 22 23 25 26 28
HS Pour ed Out:	Witness in Jerusalem Amidst Opposition	Witness in Judea and Samaria	Worldwide Witness: Gentile Inclusion	Witness in Chains: Paul’s Imprisonment & Trials
Jerusalem		Judea & Samaria	Ends of the Earth	

Key idea: Spirit-empowered witness

Key verse: 1:8

Key chapter: 2

- ***Spirit-empowered witness***—The Holy Spirit energized the early church to make a dynamic impact on the Roman world. The Spirit is mentioned over 50 times in Acts. The disciples waited on the Spirit in Jerusalem before beginning to preach (2:4) and the Holy Spirit fell on each new group of believers in dramatic fashion, including the Jews (4:31), the Samaritans (8:17), the Gentiles (10:44), and the disciples of John the Baptist (19:6). This book is not just a history of a given period in the life of the church, but a handbook for Spirit-directed Christian service and action. It illustrates the procedure and effectiveness of a church built in the principles that the Holy Spirit administers.
- ***Prayer linked to important historical junctures***—Throughout Acts, one senses the irresistible movement of the Spirit of God in answer to the prayers of His people. The early Christians are united in prayer prior to the Pentecost (1:14) and it was evidently their daily routine (2:42; 3:1). It was their first response to opposition (4:23-31) and an apostolic priority (6:4). Times of prayer preceded significant ministry advances, such as the conversion of Paul (9:11), the first Gentile conversion (10:3, 9), Peter's rescue from a Jewish prison (12:12), and the selection of the first missionary journey team (13:2). It would appear that praying was as natural as breathing to these people and accounts for the tremendous way they were used in the early expansion of the church.
- ***Gentile inclusion***—Luke records the general rejection of the gospel by the Jews across the Roman Empire and the apostles' turning to the Gentiles for a ready audience to the message of truth. The church grew rapidly independent of the Jewish synagogue and cultic rituals which hastened the final severance between Judaism and Christianity. God's salvation message burst the bonds of ethnic exclusivity (10:34-35).

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p. 185
- Spread the news.
- The church's supernatural origins and preservation.
- Ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians.
- God's unlikely leadership choices and his empowering of them to meet challenges and overcome obstacles.
- Pray for an Acts makeover—boldness and clarity in sharing the gospel, generosity in sharing your resources, and community where truth and grace is extended freely.

Texts to bookmark: Acts 1:8, 10:34-35

Chapter 29—Paul’s Mission

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 407-437
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 187-192

Biblical text:

- Acts 13-14, 16-20
- Rom. 1; 3-6, 8, 12, 15
- 1 Cor. 1, 3, 5-6, 10, 12-13, 15-16
- Gal. 1-3, 5-6
- 1 Thess. 1-5

Session overview—The fearsome persecutor of the faith became its foremost ambassador. Paul combined a first-rate theological mind, an evangelist’s zeal, a pastor’s heart, and worked at a frenetic pace. Note the characteristics of Paul’s missionary expeditions: (1) his focus on urban centers which then became the base of operations for expanding the witness to interior regions; (2) his initial focus on preaching to the Jews; (3) his subsequent turning to the Gentiles when stymied by Jewish opposition; (4) the persistent reality of Jewish opposition; (5) religious persecution that leads to persecution by the civil authorities; (6) Paul’s pattern of returning to strengthen the churches he founded; and (7) Paul’s pattern in returning to his home base at Antioch and reporting on his work.

Bible episode summaries:

- **First missionary journey (Acts 13-14)**—These chapters cover Paul’s first missionary journey. The early church grew by a radical dependence on the Holy Spirit to lead and guide them and a strategic focus on key cultural centers. Paul found culture-shapers and communicators who could be disciple and sent out on mission. Paul’s initial step in coming into town was to head to the synagogues, seeking those who already exhibited faith in God.
- **Second missionary journey (Acts 16-18; 1 Thess. 1-5)**—This segment relates events connected to the second journey. That journey started with a tragic but strategic separation of co-workers, Paul and Barnabas. Paul headed towards Macedonia and Greece, pushing towards Rome. On this mission trip, Paul recruited Timothy, who became his assistant and apostolic legate.
- **Third missionary journey (Acts 18-20; Rom. 1, 2-6, 8, 12, 15; 1 Cor. 1, 2, 5-6, 10, 12-13, 15-16; Gal. 1-3, 5, 6)**—The heart of the third missionary journey was to visit and build up churches. Paul’s individual strategy was to disciple those who would be able to disciple others. The letters written during this time go to the heart of Paul’s preaching and pastoral concerns for the churches he founded.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 486
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 189-191

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *Acts summary chart:*

Preparation for Witness Pentecost	Lame Man at Temple Ananias & Sapphira Arrest/Interrogation of Apostles; First Deacons Stephen’s Defense Deacons Chosen	Philip in Samaria Paul’s Conversion Peter Along the Coast Peter and Cornelius Herod’s Persecution	1st Missionary Journey Jerusalem Council; 2d Missionary Journey 3d Missionary Journey Ephesus Relief Mission to Jerusalem	Arrest & Initial Defense Before Sanhedrin Before Felix Before Festus & Agrippa Journey to Rome Before the Jews at Rome
1 2	3 5 6 7	8:3 9 9:32 10 12	13 15 18 19 20	21 22 23 25 26 28
HS Pour ed Out:	Witness in Jerusalem Amidst Opposition	Witness in Judea and Samaria	Worldwide Witness: Gentile Inclusion	Witness in Chains: Paul’s Imprisonment & Trials
	Jerusalem	Judea & Samaria	Ends of the Earth	

Key Idea: Spirit-empowered witness

Key verse: 1:8

Key chapter: 2

- *Paul’s Letters: Background*

<i>Letter</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Subject</i>
Galatians	49	Antioch (Syria)	Paul’s apostleship; Justification by faith; function of Law; Christian freedom
1 Thessalonians	50-51	Corinth	End Times; hard times
2 Thessalonians	50-51	Corinth	End Times; hard times

1 Corinthians	Mid-50s	Ephesus	Christian conduct (“the Cross in its social application”) – church divisions; sexual immorality; lawsuits; marriage and celibacy; freedom and questionable practices; spiritual gifts; order in worship; Lord’s Supper; Resurrection
2 Corinthians	Mid-50s	Macedonia	Paul’s apostleship; heart of an authentic ministry; leading through conflict; giving
Romans	Mid-50s	Corinth	Salvation doctrine; depravity; Law’s function; justification by faith; original sin; sanctification; glorification; security of believer; sovereignty, election, and God’s faithfulness; Christian conduct; Christian and the State; Christian freedom and questionable practices
Ephesians	Early 60s	Rome	Believer’s position in Christ; Christ in us -- church as body and organization; internal ministry of the Holy Spirit
Philippians	Early 60s	Rome	Believer’s attitudes; church’s body life
Colossians	Early 60s	Rome	Person and work of Christ; believer’s completeness in Christ; church’s body life
Philemon	Early 60s	Rome	Personal note; picture of substitutionary atonement
1 Timothy	Late 50s Early to Mid-60s	Ephesus Macedonia	Paul’s ministry counsel – sound doctrine; church order and leadership, decorum
Titus	Late 50s Early to Mid-60s	Ephesus Nicopolis	Paul’s ministry counsel – church order and leadership; sound doctrine; good deeds
2 Timothy	Late 50s Mid-60s	Ephesus Rome	Spiritual conflict; passing the torch

- **Romans summary chart:**

Introduction Pagan Licentiousness Condemned Morally Upright Condemned Religious Jew Condemned All Fall Short	Justification by Faith Apart from Law Old Testament Precedent in Abraham Justification by Faith & Security of Believer	Freedom from Sin: Dead & Alive Freedom from Law Freedom from All Bondage	God's Election of Israel Human Responsibility for Unrighteousness Future Restoration of Israel	General Exhortations Christian Liberty & Disputed Matters Future Plans & Personal Greetings
1 2 3	3:21 4 5	6 7 8	9 10 11	12 14 15-16
Condemnation of All Humanity	Justification by Faith Alone	Believer's Sanctification	God's Dealings With Israel	Transformed Living

Key idea: Righteousness

Key verses: 3:21-26

Key chapter: 5

- **1 Corinthians summary chart:**

Introduction; Thanksgiving Cause: Cross-Emptying Attitudes Spiritual and Worldly Wisdom Leadership in Perspective Immorality in Community Lawsuits Among Believers Celibacy, Marriage, & Purity Remain as You Are Principle Applied to Marriage & Celibacy Restricted Use of Liberty Paul's Example Improper Use of Liberty Women in Community Factions at the Lord's Table Abuses of Spiritual Gifts Resurrection of the Body established Nature of Resurrected Body Greetings to Various People	1:10 2 3	5 6	7	8 10	11	15	16
Intro	Divisions	Moral Laxness	Celibacy & Marriage	Christian Liberty	Church Worship	Resurrection	Greetings

Key idea: Cross in its social application

Key verses: 1:18, 30

Key chapter: 15

• **Galatians summary chart:**

Turning to Another Gospel	Paul's Message Received Directly From God	Apostolic Recognition of Paul's Ministry	Peter Confronted in Antioch on Point of Galatian Error	Galatians' Experience Abraham	Law's Curse & Christ's Redemption	Covenantal Priority: Abrahamic Over Mosaic	Law's Purpose	Abraham's Seed	Free From Law-Based Righteousness	Free Not to Indulge Sinful Nature	Not Circumcision but New Creation
1:1-10	1:12	2	3	4	5	6					
Intro	Defense of Apostolic Authority			Defense of Justification by Faith				Justification by Faith: Liberty & License			

Key idea: Justification by faith

Key chapters: 3-4

• **1 Thessalonians summary chart:**

Thanksgiving for Thessalonians	Paul' exemplary ministry among them	Concern; Timothy's good report	Living to please God with the Lord' Coming in view	Instructions: Idleness & living in community
1	2	3	4	5
Encouragement			Exhortation	

Key idea: Living now with the end in view

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p. 192
- The gospel spreads throughout the civilized world. Acts as recording the pattern of church life in between Christ's advents: its power, its objective, its methods, its essential organization and discipline, and its driving vision.
- The Holy Spirit is all over the place in Acts. How does this relate to our Presbyterian focus on Spirit and Word?
- American church as a Corinthian problem child.

Texts to bookmark: Rom. 8:31-39; 2 Cor. 5:17-21

Chapter 30—Paul’s Final Days

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 439-458
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 193-198

Biblical text:

- Acts 20-23, 27-28
- Ephesians 1-6
- 2 Timothy 1-4

Session overview—Paul was a man of action. However, he also had a focus on building relationships. Read the final chapter of any number of his letters. He greets numerous people in numerous places all over his far-flung ministry. It was through these kinds of relationships that disciples were made.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Journey continues (Acts 20-21)***—These chapters record Paul’s journey to Jerusalem to deliver the gifts the Gentiles had made for their Jewish brothers and sisters in the faith. Paul viewed this trip as a work of the Spirit in uniting Jew and Gentile.
- ***Into the fire (Acts 21-23)***—This segment relates Paul’s arrival as an unwelcome guest in Jerusalem and the false accusations that resulted in his arrest and imprisonment. Indeed, he was treated as a criminal for reaching out to Gentiles.
- ***Shipwrecked (Acts 27-28)***—These chapters record Paul’s journey to Rome. Imprisoned for a number of years and subjected to numerous hearings, Paul appeals to the emperor and is sent to Rome. Shipwrecked, both Paul and his traveling companions are providentially delivered.
- ***Letter (Ephesians; 1 Timothy)***—These letters reveal Paul’s concern for and counsel to churches he founded and co-workers he mentored. Even imprisoned, with his life at risk, Paul found time to write to his friends and the churches he planted with instructions and encouragement.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 487
- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 195-197

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- *Acts summary chart:*

Preparation for Witness Pentecost	Lame Man at Temple Ananias & Sapphira Arrest/Interrogation of Apostles; First Deacons Stephen's Defense Deacons Chosen	Philip in Samaria Paul's Conversion Peter Along the Coast Peter and Cornelius Herod's Persecution	1st Missionary Journey Jerusalem Council; 2d Missionary Journey 3d Missionary Journey Ephesus Relief Mission to Jerusalem	Arrest & Initial Defense Before Sanhedrin Before Felix Before Festus & Agrippa Journey to Rome Before the Jews at Rome
1 2	3 5 6 7	8:3 9 9:32 10 12	13 15 18 19 20	21 22 23 25 26 28
HS Out- pour -ed	Witness in Jerusalem Amidst Opposition	Witness in Judea and Samaria	Worldwide Witness: Gentile Inclusion	Witness in Chains: Paul's Imprisonment & Trials
Jerusalem		Judea & Samaria	Ends of the Earth	

Key idea: Spirit-empowered witness

Key verse: 1:8

Key chapter: 2

- *Ephesians summary chart:*

Praying – Spiritual Blessings	Maintaining Unity; Reaching Maturity
-- Spiritual Enlightenment	Putting On; Putting Off
Remembering – Made Alive in Christ	Separation From Sinful Practices
-- Made One in Christ	Separation From Sinful People
	Living Wisely – Filled with the HS
	-- Husbands & Wives
	-- Parents & Children
	-- Masters & Slaves
	Standing Firmly – Armor of God
	-- Prayer enjoined & Empowered
1	4
2	5
3	6

Spiritual Blessing in Christ	Worthy Lives as Result
We in Christ	Christ in Us

Key idea: In Christ

Key verse(s): 2:19-23

Key chapter: 1

- **2 Timothy summary chart:**

Thanksgiving; Fan the flame; suffering	Enduring hardship	Godlessness in last days; Continue in faith	Charge & crown; Personal remarks & greetings
1	2	3	4
Suffer for the Gospel		Finish the race	

Key idea: Passing the baton

Key verses: 2:2

Key chapter: 4

- **Ephesians** has been described as the “queen of the epistles”. The letter describes the richness of the believer’s position in Christ in the first three chapters of the book before exhorting us to live up to our privileges in the last three chapters. Theology and worship intersect here as the doctrine and practice of the Church is examined against the backdrop of God’s purposes. Some of the most sublime and precious truths are eloquently expounded in this book.
- **2 Timothy** is about a baton pass in a drama that is infinitely more important than an track event. As the weary apostle Paul neared death, he began to think of a successor and decided on the young man, Timothy. Tradition tells us that history gloriously confirmed the wisdom of Paul’s choice. Timothy faithfully executed a long and fruitful ministry and laid his life down in Domitian’s persecution some thirty years later, in a manner that would have made his apostolic mentor proud.

Takeaways:

- **Participant’s Guide**, p. 198
- Suffering and perseverance as part and parcel of the Christian experience.
- Ephesus cycle—the challenge of growing in the knowledge of the faith and in discipleship and persevering in devotion and love.
- Passing the baton to the next generation.
- In 2 Timothy, Paul uses three images—soldier, athlete, and farmer—to picture how we are to live as believers (2 Tim. 2:1 et seq.). What do you take away from this?

Texts to bookmark: Eph. 2:4-10, 5:15-20

Chapter 31—The End of Time

Materials:

- *The Story*, pp. 459-470
- *Participant's Guide*, pp. 199-204

Biblical text:

- Rev. 1-5, 19-22

Session overview—John's vision does more than show us the future, it reveals the center. At the heart of everything is the reality that God rules. The story concludes with all that is broken and deeply tarnished is restored. Evil is defeated and creation is renewed. In response to our sin and rebellion, God proves to be both just and gracious. Our hope is placed before us: to live with God forever in a world renewed and freed from the curse of sin.

Bible episode summaries:

- ***Risen Christ (Rev. 1)***—This chapter presents the risen Lord as majestic, awe-inspiring figure, reminiscent of a number of Old Testament prophetic visions.
- ***To the churches (Rev. 2-3)***—These chapters relate the Lord's assessment of a number of churches which are in various states of spiritual health. Smyrna and Philadelphia are commended and Sardis and Laodicea are rebuked. Ephesus, Pergamun, and Thyatira have a mixed review. The word to these churches is also a word to us today.
- ***Center of it all (Rev. 4)***—This chapter presents an awe-inspiring picture of the all-consuming center—the throne of God.
- ***Lion is the lamb (Rev. 5)***—This chapter presents the ironic center of all history. The lamb who was slain is one and the same as the lion who rules. Redemption is the ultimate revelation of God's kingdom rule.
- ***Warrior-king (Rev. 19)***—The world as we know it will end when the King of kings and Lord of lords returns in judgment to establish once and for all God's visible, kingdom rule.
- ***Judgment throne (Rev. 20)***—This chapter clearly teaches that we will all stand before God. Our only hope lies in the mercy of God expressed sublimely in the cross of Christ. Faith in Christ and his sacrificial death will be our refuge from the just punishment for our sins.
- ***Eden again but better (Rev. 21)***—This chapter entails God's answer to the groaning of all creation. The new heavens and the new earth will be even better than we can imagine. This is not just a "reset" to Eden. We will see God for who he really is.
- ***Life for then right now (Rev. 22)***—The story ends with a simple message—live today as if this story is real. Since all creation will one day be reconciled, live today as a minister of reconciliation, a representative of God to a lost world.

Discussion questions:

- *The Story*, p. 487

- *Participant’s Guide*, pp. 201-203

Additional charts, notes, and observations:

- **Revelation summary chart:** The chart below presents a common amillennial outline of the book.

Son of Man Letter to the Churches	Heavenly Throne First to Sixth Seals Interlude	Prayers of the Saints First to Sixth Trumpets Interlude	Woman & Child Dragon & War Beasts Lamb & His People Harvesting Angels	Vision of Plagues Seven Bowls of Wrath	Harlot & Beast Babylon Feast of the Lamb Second Coming	Judgment New Heavens & Earth River, Tree, Invite
1 2-3	4-5 6 7 8	8 8-9 10-11	12 13 14	15 16	17 18 19	20 21 22
Vision 1: Seven Lamps	Vision 2: Seven Seals	Vision 3: Seven Trumpets	Vision 4: Seven Signs of Conflict	Vision 5: Seven Bowls of Wrath	Vision 6: Judgment & Victory of the Lamb	Vision 7: New Heavens & New Earth

Revelation introduction—The apostle John wrote this book while imprisoned on the island of Patmos late in the reign of the Emperor Domitian, probably in the mid-90s. Some believe that the book was written at an earlier date, during Nero’s persecution of Christians following the burning of Rome in 64. The book is addressed to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia. The churches had been in existence for some time, had undergone various degrees of spiritual development and decline, and were confronting either actual or imminent persecution. There was a growing hostility between the church and the Roman state. Revelation was written as encouragement for churches sensing this growing hostility and as a warning to careless Christians who were tempted to lapse into an easy conformity to the world.

Revelation unveils the character and program of God. Its purpose is to reveal God’s sovereignty in the affairs of people in time and eternity. One day God will bring history to a triumphant climax in Christ. It is only the resurrected Christ who has the authority to judge the earth, remake it, and rule it in righteousness.

Interpretive approaches—Understanding the exotic imagery of this book is central to its proper interpretation and application. Interpretations of the book have historically fallen into one of four categories:

- **Idealist view**—This perspective considers Revelation to be a symbolic picture of the enduring struggle between good and evil, between Christianity and the forces marshaled against the faith. The symbols in the book cannot be and ought not be identified with particular historical events either in the past or the future. They simply are trends and ideals. The principles of spiritual warfare are operative throughout the ages and may have repeated embodiments. The impact of the entire message, rather than the literal details, is the point of the book.
- **Preterist view**—“Preterist” comes from the Latin word *praeter*, meaning “past”. This view understands Revelation as growing out of and describing events in the apostle’s own day. Preterists share much of the same disposition towards the book as those in the idealist camp, except that they limit the scope of the book to a description of the persecution of Christianity by ancient Rome and to what was expected to happen after the destruction of the Roman Empire.
- **Historicist view**—This perspective regards Revelation as describing events from the time of John’s visions on the isle of Patmos to the end of history. Thus, interpreters speak of the breaking of the seven seals as representing the fall of the Roman Empire, locusts from the bottomless pit as standing for the Islamic invaders around the time of Mohammed, the beast from the pit as symbolizing the Roman papacy (as many in the time of the Reformation believed), and so forth. Explanations of the various symbols in Revelation have varied widely among members of this school of thought. A number of the Reformers held to this view.
- **Futurist view**—This view places most of the events recorded in Revelation (chapters 4-22) in the time immediately preceding Christ’s Second Coming. While the first three chapters are viewed as relating to the apostolic church, the last nineteen leap forward to the end of the age. Many futurists seek to discern particular meanings behind the symbols in the book, diligently comparing them to many of the Old Testament passages from which the images are drawn, not content to merely ascertain the big picture.

A graphic comparison of these views may be helpful:

<i>View</i>	<i>Rev 1-3</i>	<i>Rev 4-19</i>	<i>Rev 20-22</i>
Idealist	Historic churches	Symbolic of the conflict between good and evil	Symbolic of the triumph of good
Preterist	Historic churches	Symbolic of contemporary conditions in John’s time	Symbolic of heaven and the Lord’s ultimate triumph

Historicist	Historic churches	Symbolic of historical events through the ages	Final judgment; eternal state
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Millennial Views—Differences in millennial views relate to the understanding of Revelation 20:1-6, which speaks of believers reigning with Christ a thousand years, and to the chronological relation of this passage with Revelation 19:11-21, which describes Christ’s Second Coming and His complete victory over the forces of evil opposing Him. Is the thousand-year period described in Revelation 20 literal or figurative? Do the events of Revelation 20 chronologically follow those described in Revelation 19, or does Revelation 20 introduce another cycle of the book which describes God’s judgment leading up to the Lord’s return.

There are three major millennial views:

Postmillennialism—Postmillennialists (postmils) believe that the reference to a thousand years in Revelation 20 speaks figuratively of a long interval of time that precedes the Second Coming of Christ. This perspective holds that the gospel will spread throughout the world in this present age and will usher in a golden age of peace on earth followed by Christ’s return. The basic tenets of this view include:

- *Nature of the Kingdom*—The kingdom of God is primarily a present reality; it is the rule of Christ in the hearts of people.
- *Widespread Preaching of and Response to the Gospel*—Postmils expect a wide-ranging conversion of people from every nation on the earth prior to Christ’s return. Not everyone will be converted, but a great multitude from every walk of life and every nation will come to faith. Many postmils also expect that a large number of Jewish people will be included in this worldwide awakening on the basis of Romans 11:25-26.
- *Nature of the Millennium*—There will be a very long period of earthly peace called the millennium. This is not a literal thousand-year period, just a lengthy span of time. God’s kingdom will grow gradually as the gospel is preached around the world. While premils expect a dramatic and radical in-breaking of Christ’s visible rule on earth, postmils see the kingdom spreading as the gospel is preached and the millennium resulting from the spread of righteousness. For postmils, the millennium differs from the present age only in degree.
- *Final Rebellion*—At the end of the millennium, there will be a time of apostasy and a flare up of evil in connection with the coming of the Antichrist. Evil will be shown to be what it truly is and God’s just punishment will be seen as eminently deserved.
- *Return of Christ*—The millennium will end with the personal, bodily return of Christ followed immediately by the resurrection and judgment of all people, both righteous and unrighteous, and their assignment to heaven or hell.

Amillennialism—Literally, amillennialism means “not [no] millennium”. Amillennialists (amils) do not reject the teaching of the millennium, just the millennium as envisioned by premils and postmils. Most amils hold that the millennium is a figurative reference to the reign of Christ, and

of believers with Him, in the present age (between the Lord's first and second comings). In essence, the millennium is being realized now. The first resurrection of Revelation 20:4 refers either to Christians who have died and are with Christ in heaven or to life in Christ which starts with the new birth. Amils believe that Satan has been bound (as referred to in Rev 20) through the triumph of Christ in His crucifixion and resurrection. Unlike postmils, amils do not believe that actual earthly conditions will get better and better. Sin will run its course and Christ will return to judge the world and usher in the eternal state, including the new heavens and the new earth. Some basic tenets of amillennialism include:

- *Second Coming as Inaugurating the Eternal State*—The Second Coming of Christ will inaugurate the eternal state for both believers and unbelievers. There will be no transitional state—the millennium envisioned by the premils. The Second Coming sets in motion a number of events in close sequence—a general resurrection of both believers and unbelievers, the transformation of living believers (1 Cor 15:51-52), the rapture or catching up of Believers to welcome the descending Lord to earth (1 Thess 4:16-17), final judgment of both believers and unbelievers (Mt 25:31-46), and the ushering in of the eternal order.
- *Millennium as Symbolic*—The thousand-year period mentioned in Revelation 20 is symbolic, not literal. The reference is not a temporal matter at all. Furthermore, the two resurrections mentioned in Revelation 20:4-6 do not, as premils contend, require an intervening millennium. Most amils understand the first resurrection as spiritual and the second as physical. Some see both as spiritual.
- *Figurative interpretation of Old Testament prophecies*—Old Testament prophecies are interpreted less literally than premils. These prophecies are interpreted as fulfilled in the history of the church or in the eternal state rather than in a literal, seven-year tribulational period or during a millennial reign of Christ.
- *Interpretation of Revelation*—The typical amil approach to Revelation is one of progressive parallelism. They believe that Revelation consists of seven sections which run parallel to each other, each depicting the church and the world between the times of Christ's first and second comings. These sections typically are as follows:

Rev 1-3	Seven lampstands—Messages to the churches;
Rev 4-7	Seven seal judgments;
Rev 8-11	Seven trumpet judgments;
Rev 12-14	Seven signs of conflict—Description of key spiritual players;
Rev 15-16	Seven bowl judgments;
Rev 17-19	Victory and judgment of Christ—Fall of the earthly order, the dragon, and the beasts;
Rev 20-22	New heavens and the new earth—Completion of Christ's victory over His enemies and the ushering in of the eternal state.

In this treatment, there is a progression. Revelation 1-11 describes the struggle on earth, picturing the church persecuted by the world. Revelation 12-22 gives the deeper spiritual background of this struggle, describing the persecution of the church by Satan and his henchmen.

Premillennialism—Premillennialists (premys) believe that Christ will personally return to initiate the visible manifestation of His kingdom; that the righteous dead will be raised and join the living believers in reigning with the Lord on earth for a thousand years (usually understood as a literal time period); that subsequent to this reign there will be a final rebellion that will be immediately suppressed, the wicked judged, and the eternal state inaugurated. There are two main camps in premillennialism: pre-tribulationism (or dispensational premillennialism) and post-tribulationism (or historic premillennialism, so-called because of its affinity to the chiliasm of the early Fathers like Irenaeus).

Pre-tribulationists (pre-tribbers) believe that God will completely restore the national Israel through a literal seven-year period called the Great Tribulation, which, according to pretribbers, is described in detail in Revelation 4-19. They sharply distinguish God’s dealings with Israel and His dealings with the church. Dispensational premils believe that the church will be raptured (*rapturo* is Latin for caught up – translating the Greek verb in 1Thess 4:17) before the period of the tribulation described in Revelation. They believe that the events of the Great Tribulation are used of God to bring Israel to Himself and to inaugurate His millennial reign on earth. Mid-tribulationism (the church won’t be raptured until the middle of the tribulation) and partial rapturism (only the “godly” part of the church will be raptured) are variations of this approach.

Post-tribulationists (post-tribbers) do not make sharp distinctions between God’s dealings with Israel and God’s dealings with the church. They teach that the people of God will be on earth during the entire tribulation period after which Christ will come in triumph to judge His enemies and to inaugurate His visible reign on earth. Basic tenets of premillennialism include:

- *Two physical resurrections in Rev 20:4-6*—Revelation 20:4-6 is something of a watershed passage for millennial views. Here, the apostles and those given authority to judge and the righteous martyrs are described as coming to life and reigning with Christ for a thousand years. In pertinent part, the text states:

“They came to life (ezesan) and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life (ezesan) until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them ...”

Premils insist that the two resurrections referred to are bodily in nature and of different groups of people separated by an interval of time (the thousand years of the millennium). They point out that the same word (indeed, the same form and tense of the same word – *ezesan*) is used in both references and insist that the word used elsewhere refers to a physical resurrection. While it is possible in principle for one or both resurrections to be spiritual, there needs to be some clue in the literary context to suggest this. Premils see nothing in the context to indicate that the two resurrections are different in kind. In addition, they think that the passage also implies that those who participate in the first

resurrection do not participate in the second, for the passage makes a contrast between those raised at the beginning of the millennium and those raised at the end.

Amils argue that the language concerning the second death in 20:6 suggests a contrast between the first and second death, the first being bodily and preliminary and the second being spiritual and final. Likewise, they reason, the first and second resurrections are preliminary and ultimate as well, only this time, the first is spiritual and the second is physical. Amils insist that a single physical resurrection precedes a single general judgment.

- *Nature of the Millennium*—Although there are important variations, premils view the millennium as having certain common elements:
 - Jesus Christ will have absolute control. Overt opposition will be confined or eliminated.
 - It will be a period of truly righteous rule. Torah on the heart as taught in the Sermon on the Mount will be experiential reality.
 - Christ's reign will be a political reality, ushering in worldwide peace.
 - In its character, the millennium will be clearly distinct from the rest of history.
 - There will be harmony in nature. All hostility within the forces of nature and among its creatures will cease.
 - The saints will reign with Christ. Faithfulness in small things in this age, renders opportunities to co-labor with God on a larger page in the next age.
- *Israel and the Millennium*—Premils see a significant moving of the Spirit of God among the physical descendants of Abraham in the End Times. But with this general description, agreement ends. Pre-tribbers (dispensational premils) hold that the millennium itself will have an essentially Jewish flavor and that there will be a virtual restoration of the Old Testament economy (understood as fulfilled in Christ). According to this perspective, when God has accomplished His purpose with the church (His New Testament people), He will renew His concern for national Israel. In the millennium, God will restore national Israel to a favored place in His program and will fulfill each of His prophetic promises to Israel. Thus, from this perspective, passages like Ezekiel 40-48 are to be literally fulfilled (e.g. in the building of a millennial temple).

Post-tribbers (historic premils) place little emphasis on national Israel, believing that the prophecies and promises to Israel are fulfilled in the church. However, most post-tribbers see a significant awakening among the Jewish people at the end of the age on the basis of such texts as Rom 11:25-26.

Apocalyptic—Revelation belongs to the category of apocalyptic literature. Such literature is characterized by

- Symbolic language, dreams, and visions;
- Intense despair over the present circumstances and pervasive hope of future divine intervention;

- Celestial powers (angels and demons) as messengers and agents working out God's purposes; and
- The catastrophic judgment of the wicked and the supernatural deliverance of the righteous.

Most of Revelation's imagery is derived from the Old Testament prophetic books. The outlook of this type of literature is pessimistic in the sense that the world, in itself, is hopelessly lost and corrupt. The book calls the people of God to persevere and sinners to repent for the old age is groaning to a close and a divine cataclysm will usher in a new age which is completely different.

Restoration—Note the parallels between the first three (Gen 1-3) and the last three (Rev 20-22) chapters of the Bible:

Gen 1-3

Rev 20-22

God created the heavens and earth (1:1)
 Darkness he called night (1:5)
 God made the sun and moon (1:16)
 Death comes with eating of the tree (2:17; 3:19)
 Satan appears as humanity's deceiver (3:1)
 Garden of Eden defiled (3:6-7)
 Walk of God with people interrupted (3:8-10)
 Initial triumph of the serpent (3:13)
 Sorrow greatly multiplied (3:16)
 Cursed is the ground (3:17)
 Adam's dominion broken (3:19)
 Eden closed and people barred (3:23-24)

 Access to the tree of life denied (3:24)
 People driven from God's presence (3:24)

New heavens and new earth (21:1)
 There is no night there (21:25)
 No need of sun or moon (21:23)
 There shall be no more death (21:4)
 Satan disappears forever (20:10)
 City of God never defiled (21:27)
 Dwelling with people resumed (21:3)
 Ultimate triumph of Lamb (21:3; 22:3)
 No more sorrow (21:4)
 No more curse (22:3)
 Christ's dominion restored (22:5)
 Paradise open and people welcomed (21:24-25)
 Access to tree reinstated (22:14)
 They shall see His face (22:4)

Takeaways:

- *Participant's Guide*, p. 204
- The King is coming—the function of hope in living as we should.
- In the meanwhile, lessons from the seven churches.
- In another age, a complaint was sometimes made that people were so heavenly minded that they were no earthly good. Do you think our modern culture has worked a reversal of that complaint in today's age?

Texts to bookmark: Gen. 3:17-19; Rev. 22:3-5