Threads

tracing the eternal gospel through the old testament

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Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Luke 24:27 (NLT)

matthias' lot church

loving him
& loving his.

Threads: ***tracing the eternal gospel through the old testament***

Jesus' command to make disciples (**Matthew 28:19**) belongs to the global church as the one body of Christ; God, in his grace, establishes local expressions of his body to work together as fellow stewards of the gospel and partners in building his kingdom.

Threads is an in-house product of Matthias' Lot Church—a church on mission to make disciples of Jesus who enjoy God and make him known. This resource has been made available for churches and individuals to use for the purpose of encouraging and equipping the saints to make disciples who make disciples for the glory of God until Christ returns.

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Before you begin, please read the introduction on pages 1–3. It contains important context that will be helpful for your study.

can we understand the bible?

why read the bible?

The Bible is one book made up of 66 smaller books; within these books are historical narratives, prayers, instructions, prophecies, wisdom, and praise. The whole Bible was written in a span of over 1500 years, so **it can seem that the stories are disconnected from one another and irrelevant to us**—but nothing could be further from the truth.

Scripture weaves together one overarching story through which we can better understand the individual events and accounts detailed throughout its pages. The Bible was written by many different people, but ultimately has **one divine author revealing his cohesive story of redemption.**

God speaks to us through his word. Unfortunately, some people do not read it because they find it confusing and give up out of discouragement. But God desires for us to understand his word and through it, know him. **The truth is we cannot love a God we don't know, and we can never truly know God apart from his word**.

*All Scripture is **breathed out by God** and profitable...*

2 Timothy 3:16

how do we read the bible?

Since we come to know God *through* his word, we must regularly meet with him *in* his word. So how can we intentionally engage our minds and hearts as we read the Scriptures?

- **Begin with prayer**—we cannot understand God's word apart from the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit; therefore, it is wise to always begin your time in the word with prayer. **Ask the Spirit to open your mind and heart** to understand what you are reading and to help you live in worshipful obedience to his voice.
- **Read repetitively**—the more we read, the more we see the patterns and themes God has intentionally placed in his story. God's word is living and active; **we can never get to the end of abiding in it**. The goal is intimacy not mastery.
- **Have a holy curiosity**—we will never exhaust the depths of who God is. **There is always more to discover**, so as you read, allow yourself to have a holy curiosity: ask a lot of questions, go to God with those thoughts, listen for his voice, and be content in the tension of having unanswered questions.
- **Study in community**—it is important to spend individual time in the word with the Lord, but **it is equally beneficial to spend time in his word with others**. In that community, as you give voice to what the Holy Spirit is teaching you, it both solidifies what you have learned as well as encourages others in their faith.
- **Focus on God**—since the Bible is all God's story, **it is important to not lose sight of God while reading**. Our study of his word should never lead to mere head knowledge, rather it is how we can truly know and worship our Creator.

why does it matter that the bible is telling one story?

Every story in the Bible was intentionally included by the divine Author, which means **every word and phrase has value and meaning**. Once you see the overarching story of Scripture, reading the Bible becomes a deep dive into the riches of God's unparalleled creativity, his endless mercy, and his steadfast love for his people.

The one story of God is the one eternal plan of God for the redemption and adoption of his people in his one Son. **Jesus is the one to whom every story points**. In him we find all the wisdom and promises of God.

The stories of Scripture are historically true as well as spiritually significant. As you familiarize yourself with these narratives, you will begin to see **recurring themes and types God has intentionally woven throughout Scripture**. You will also be better able to read each verse in the context of its particular story—while placing it in the overarching story of the entire Bible.

Every believer, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is invited to read and understand God's unchanging word. The more we study the Bible and process its truths with others, the more we will understand which will lead to increased confidence when we read and increased desire to hear from the Lord in his word.

what is the story?

Scripture tells one overarching story of a faithful God who pursues his people relentlessly—**literally moving heaven and earth to dwell with those who are his**. From the beginning of time, he purposed to create a people for his own possession. However, Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, fracturing creation and our access to a holy God.

God, in his steadfast love, determined to reconcile us to himself and redeem our lives for his name's sake. **He promises that one day all things will be made new** as evil is put to death, and we are able to live in the presence of our Savior for all eternity.

Scripture recounts stories of many people who were used mightily by the Lord, showed steadfast faith, and followed God with their lives, but ultimately they were all sinful humans just like us. They are not simply heroes we are to imitate, but rather **shadows of the promised greater one who was to come**. They all serve to show us our need for a better mediator, a truer prophet, a holier priest, a wholly perfect king.

The narrative of Scripture moves from creation to the fall of Adam and Eve, followed by centuries of God promising a coming redemption which is fulfilled in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. However, **that is not the end of the story**.

We, too, find *our* stories in the grander story God is still writing. In the end, we are promised that he will be faithful to restore all things to their intended perfect design in the creation of the new heavens and the new earth. Our King Jesus will eternally dwell with all his people—which has been his divine plan since before time began.

creation → fall → redemption → restoration: the story of the Bible

why read the old testament?

The writings of the Old Testament start at the beginning of time—very literally *"in the beginning"*—and follow the story of God and his people until about 400 years before the birth of Christ.

It is inaccurate to interpret *old* to mean *outdated* or *irrelevant*. In fact, **these Scriptures are fundamental to us as believers**. The Old Testament contains the Scriptures that were used by the New Testament believers, the apostles, and by Jesus himself. In fact, the New Testament quotes the Old Testament close to 300 times, and if we include where the New Testament alludes to the Old Testament, that number jumps to nearly 1,000.

Reading and understanding the Old Testament is essential to understanding the New Testament. The New Testament is not a replacement for the old—rather it is a continuation of the one story God has been writing since time began.

Within the pages of the Old Testament, we learn about...

- the creation of the world
- the formation of God's people
- their obedience and disobedience
- their deliverance and conquest of the land
- the history of the judges
- the lineage of the kings and kingdoms
- the exile and return
- the prophecies of the coming Messiah

...and most importantly, we learn about God. **It is in the Old Testament where we begin to see and know the character of our unchanging God.**

And he is still writing his story in our lives today. As his children, we are a part of his ongoing purpose to rescue and redeem his people and bring glory to his name.

So we read the Old Testament as a book written about God that we may know and worship him more. The story of God was not just written for the believers of old—**it was written for us, too**.

For whatever was written in former days **was written for our instruction,** *that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

Romans 15:4

threads

the beginnings

genesis

As you interact with the Scriptures in each section, keep these three questions at the forefront of your mind:

» *What **observations** have you made while reading this Scripture?*

» *What **questions** come to mind as you continue to process what you've read?*

» *What do you see about God that causes your heart to **worship**?*

creation

***read:* Genesis 1–2**

God is **limitless**—he is outside of time and space and is not constrained by anything ever.
God is **eternal**—he is self-existing from eternity past to eternity future.
God is **omnipresent**—he is fully present everywhere at all times.

...so when the word of God opens with the phrase "*in the beginning,*" these three profound words mark the beginning of time itself.

» *What comes to mind as you consider that there was a time when time did not exist and that God has eternally existed outside of time?*

» *What does it mean for your daily life that this is still true of God today?*

Many different narratives exist about how the world came to be, but only one is true. **Our God is a masterful creator!** He created the world and everything in it out of nothing—he needed absolutely nothing outside of himself to create the universe. Additionally, **he did not create out of any need that existed in himself**—he has eternally been self-existing and self-fulfilling (**Acts 17:24–25**).

» *Why would God have chosen to create anything?*

» *God spoke the world into existence; what does this say about the power of God's word—both spoken and written?*

» *In what ways are all three members of the Trinity present at creation? (**John 1:1–5**)*

Our Creator is flawlessly intentional in all his ways. He values process and creates nothing haphazardly or for no purpose. As you read the creation account in **Genesis 1:1–26**, think about the following questions:

» *Where do you notice God's divine intentionality?*

» *Why might God have taken time to create when he could have effortlessly spoken everything into existence instantaneously?*

» *What does the creation account reveal about God's character, and how does that lead you to worship?*

Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and **by your will they existed and were created.**

Revelation 4:11

Through the first six days, we see a pattern: God speaks creation into existence and Scripture closes each day with "*and there was evening and there was morning, the _____ day.*" In **Genesis 2:1-3**, this rhythm changes.

» *What happens on the seventh day, and why might it end differently from days one through six?*

» *Why do you think day seven is included in the creation narrative? What might God intend for us to learn about him and his desire for us?*

creation of mankind

Genesis 2 is not a new creation account but rather a ground-level and more descriptive view of how God created. It is important to keep in mind when reading Scripture that **God is not as interested in a chronological narrative of events as he is the message being conveyed**.

The pinnacle of God's creation comes on the sixth day. In these Scriptures, we are given a glimpse into the divine dialogue of the triune God concerning the creation of man and woman.

» *Even though Adam has perfect fellowship with God, why does God state that it is not good for Adam to be alone?*

» *Why might God have waited to create Eve until after Adam names all the animals? What is Adam celebrating when he finally sees Eve?*

» *What does it mean to be made in God's image?*

God creates his image bearers and gives them what is often referred to as the *creation mandate*: **be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over every living thing on the earth**. They are to fill the earth with more image bearers who would rule over the world as ambassadors of the Creator God who is ruler over all.

» *What are the implications of the creation mandate for us today?*

seeing Jesus

Jesus is the perfect image of God who came to redeem imperfect image bearers (**Colossians 1:15–20**). As God opened Adam's side and used his rib to create his bride, Eve, so too in the crucifixion, Christ's side was pierced as he gave his life for the creation of his bride, the church (**John 19:34; Ephesians 5:25–27**).

From eternity past, before he came to earth as the man Jesus, the Son of God has eternally existed (**John 17:5**). He has always been both present and active in all of creation (**John 1:1–5**). God created everything out of nothing in six days and then he rested on the seventh day as both a pattern and an invitation for us to cease from work and rest in him. This rest begins the moment we come to Christ by faith—and he will be for us our eternal seventh-day rest (**Matthew 11:28–30**).

the fall

read: **Genesis 3**

Everything that God created was good and pure and beautiful. There was no fear or pain or death. Adam and Eve had unhindered intimacy with their Lord God in the perfect world and lavish garden he had prepared for them. It was all theirs to care for and enjoy. There was only one condition: **they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**

» *Pause and imagine what it must have been like to live in this sinless world as a sinless individual.*

» *Read **Genesis 2:15-18**: why did God place the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden?*

» *Why would God not want them to have knowledge of good and evil?*

In the very first verse of this chapter, we are introduced to a new character: the serpent. The book of Revelation reveals that **this serpent is none other than Satan himself** (**Revelation 12:9**). Satan is God's enemy, and as image bearers of God, he is our enemy as well.

» *What is Satan trying to accomplish in his conversation with Eve?*

» *Why might they believe the enemy over what God said?*

» *Satan has not changed his tactics: how is he tempting you in similar ways?*

After eating the fruit, they immediately begin to experience shame and fear and rivalry—things they had never known before. **They feel the need to hide** from both each other and the Lord, but the Lord is not unaware of what they had done, and he comes to them.

» *God is all-knowing, so why does he come to Adam and Eve with questions?*

» *What do their responses reveal about their now-sinful hearts?*

» *Eve is the first to eat of the fruit; why then throughout Scripture does Adam bear the responsibility for original sin?*

Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him...do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 23:24

Thankfully, the Lord does not let us hide; he confronts us in our sin and pursues us with his love and grace. **God is eternally unchanging**, so this is how he responds to Adam and Eve as well—he addresses their sin and responds with the resulting consequences.

» *Reflect on **Genesis 3:14–19**: why might God have chosen to focus on these particular consequences?*

» *Contemplate the far-reaching effects of their sin and the corresponding depths of God's grace which are so often overlooked in this passage.*

» *God tells them that if they eat of the forbidden tree they will die, yet we see them still living after their disobedience. What does God mean by "die?"*

After God declares these consequences, **he continues to care for his children**. He clothes them with animal skins, ushers them out of the garden, and guards the entrance to the garden so they can never return.

» *What is significant about God clothing Adam and Eve specifically with animal skins? (**Hebrews 9:22**)*

» *How is ushering them out of the garden actually loving and gracious rather than cruel or vindictive?*

In God's curse on the serpent, **we receive the first whisper of the gospel**: he declares that one day a woman would bear a son who would crush the serpent's head (**Genesis 3:15**).

» *Who is the promised son, how does he crush the serpent's head, and how does the serpent bruise his heel?*

Adam shows his faith in God's promise when he names his wife *Eve* for she would become the "*mother of all living.*" **And a serpent crusher would come who would be for us eternal life**.

seeing Jesus

As a result of Adam's sin, all of humanity is born with a sinful nature (**Romans 5:18–19**). Jesus, God incarnate, came for us in our sin and is the promised Son who came to crush the head of the serpent (**1 John 3:8**). He destroyed the power of sin and death and has become for us everlasting life (**John 3:16**). As Adam and Eve were clothed in animal skins, once saved, we are clothed in Christ's righteousness as a result of his sacrifice on the cross (**Isaiah 61:10, Galatians 3:26–27**). In him, we have regained access into his presence now and will one day eat freely of the tree of life (**Revelation 2:7**) and have unhindered intimacy with our triune God forever (**Revelation 21:3**).

cain and abel

read: **Genesis 4:1–16**

Sin enters God's story, and he removes Adam and Eve from the garden—this is not punishment, but **his grace towards humanity**. In his grace, he keeps them from eating of the tree of life and, therefore, living forever in their sinful state separated from intimate relationship with him.

Mercifully, he does not leave them; he covers their nakedness and ushers them out of the garden with a beautiful promise: **the offspring of the woman would crush the serpent**. However, he did not give them a timeline for this promise.

» *Considering the promise of* **Genesis 3:15***, what assumptions might Eve be making with the birth of her first son?*

Cain is the first son ever born on earth. After him, Eve gives birth to a second son, Abel. While they are brothers, they are also very different individuals—**Abel is a shepherd; Cain cultivates the ground**.

» *The brothers each bring an offering to the Lord. What differences do you observe in what and how they give?*

» *What could have been the reason God does not accept Cain's offering?*

» *Read* **Hebrews 11:4** *and* **1 John 3:11-12***: what do we learn about these two men?*

Cain does not heed the Lord's invitation to do what is right but instead satiates his anger with the murder of his brother.

» *What do you notice about the posture of Cain's heart toward God compared to God's heart for Cain?*

» *What similarities can you see between* ***Genesis 4:9–16*** *and* ***Genesis 3:9–24****?*

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and **sin when it is fully grown brings forth death***.*

James 1:14–15

» *How might Cain's murder of Abel serve Satan's purposes?*

Embittered by the consequences of his sin, Cain objects that he will be killed by others. However, God promises to protect him even as he removes him from the fertile ground he has worked all his life.

For godly grief produces **a repentance that leads to salvation** *without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*

2 Corinthians 7:10

» *God could have simply killed Cain. Instead, how does the way God interacts with him reveal his holy character?*

» *Notice all the ways Cain responds to God. How does he fail to express genuine confession and repentance?*

» *Consider with the Lord what motivates you to confess sin and whether it leads you to true repentance.*

seeing Jesus

Cain was warned against allowing sin to master him, but Jesus came to set us free from the chains of sin and death (**Romans 6:11–14**). Unlike Cain, who took his younger brother's life, Jesus is the older brother who gave his life for all his brothers and sisters (**Hebrews 2:17**). While Abel's blood condemns Cain, Christ's blood releases us from all condemnation (**Romans 8:1**). Jesus was the perfect, preeminent sacrifice who purchased salvation with his own spilled blood (**Hebrews 12:24**), and he has become his "*brother's keeper*" for all eternity (**John 6:37**).

noah and the ark

read: **Genesis 6–7**

Many generations later, it becomes clear that the promised son is not going to come directly from Eve. **The Lord is about his perfect timing** and teaching his children to wait expectantly on him.

Evil extends to every corner of the earth, and ten generations (1,000+ years) from the beginning of time, people have rejected God altogether and instead are running after their own evil desires. This was not what God desired for his image bearers; **they were to reflect him and his character, not emulate the enemy**.

» *Imagine being God and seeing your image bearers give their lives over to evil (**Genesis 6:1–7**). Why might God have chosen the destruction of mankind as the appropriate judgment at this time?*

In the garden of Eden, the serpent convinced Eve to eat the fruit—she *saw* that it was *good* and so she *took* (**Genesis 3:6**). In this passage, the sons of God see that the daughters of man are attractive (the Hebrew word ṭôḇ = *good*) and so they *take* (**Genesis 6:2**).

» *Read **Job 1:6** and **Jude 1:6**. According to these verses, to whom might the "sons of God" be referring?*

» *How might Satan be using these unholy unions as an attempt to thwart God's redemptive plan declared in **Genesis 3:15**?*

God determines to flood the earth as judgment for the rampant evil. Every living thing will be lost in this judgment except those whom God chooses to save in the ark. Out of all the people on the earth, there is only one man who finds favor in the eyes of the Lord. **Noah and his family will be the only surviving members of humanity, and the ark will be their means of salvation**.

» *Why doesn't God destroy all living things—humans and animals—and start over?*

» *What about Noah sets him apart from those around him?*

» *God's command to Noah makes no earthly sense. What are some things God asks of us that make no sense from a human perspective?*

God's plan for deliverance will require extraordinary faith and obedience from Noah. Not only is he told to build an ark, but it is to be built according to very detailed specifications. **It would need to withstand a worldwide flood** and also house a male and female of every animal on earth, plus the animals required for sacrifices.

We are given no indication as to what Noah did for the first 500 years of his life, but **he became an architect and an animal keeper at the Lord's command**.

» *What do you observe about the conversations between God and Noah?*

» *Imagine watching God bring all the necessary animals to the ark: when has your faith been strengthened by seeing God do the seemingly impossible?*

the flood

read: **Genesis 8–9**

Finally, the time comes. The ark is completed, the chosen animals are inside, and Noah and his family are safely on board. **God closes and seals the one and only door to the ark**. Then the waters begin to fall from the heavens and burst forth from the earth. This continues for 40 days and 40 nights until all the earth is under water and every living thing has perished except those inside the ark.

» *Put yourself in the ark and imagine the horror of the surrounding situation. What would be your response toward God?*

» *In what ways does the ark symbolize our salvation?*

» *Pause and contemplate all that God has saved you from—both now and for eternity—and thank him for his grace in your salvation.*

Five months after the flood begins, the water subsides enough for the ark to **come to rest on the mountains of Ararat**. Yet it will be several more months until those in the ark can finally exit onto dry land at God's command. In total, they will have been in the ark for a little over a year (**Genesis 7:11, Genesis 8:13–14**).

In Hebrew, "Ararat" means **the reverse of the curse.**

» *Imagine the world Noah beholds as he walks out of the ark. Why might Noah render burnt offerings to God as he begins his new life on dry ground?*

» *What are the details of the covenant God makes with creation, Noah, and every living thing in* **Genesis 9:8-17***?*

» *Read* **Genesis 6:5** *and* **8:21–22***: what is clear about the condition of man's heart? What does God's response reveal about his steadfast commitment to his people and his plan?*

seeing Jesus

As a result of sin, the world is corrupt and headed for destruction (**2 Peter 3:1–7**). The judgment of the flood can seem cruel; however, it is in the severe mercy of God that he puts an end to humanity's inevitable descent into evil chaos. God will further his redemptive plan with his chosen servant Noah, who is a shadow of the chosen Servant to come (**Mark 10:45**).

We also see God's severe mercy at the foot of the cross. At the cross of Christ, we receive the mercy of God in the severity of Christ's crucifixion (**Isaiah 53:10**).

Noah's only hope for survival was to follow God obediently into the ark; our only hope is to find refuge in the only one who can save us. Jesus is the ark—the one who has reversed the curse of sin by becoming a curse for us (**Galatians 3:13**)—and if we are *in him* we have no reason to fear the coming wrath of God. Those who have taken refuge in him will forever be safe (**1 Thessalonians 5:9–11**).

Just as it was in the days of Noah,
so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.

Luke 17:26

the tower of babel

read: **Genesis 11:1–9**

As recorded in **Genesis 9:18–29**, Noah lives another 350 years after the flood. Yet the only thing God tells us is that Noah plants a vineyard, gets drunk on the wine, and lies naked in his tent. His son Ham sins against him, eliciting a prophetic curse on Ham's fourth son Canaan from the mouth of Noah—who also pronounces prophetic blessings on his sons Japheth and Shem.

» *Why might this be the only story about Noah's last 350 years that God chooses to include in his word?*

These sons have children of their own, and **through one family, human beings once again begin to fill the earth**. Inevitably, these people are sinful just as humanity has been since **Genesis 3**. There is no escaping this shared reality; people are sinful and consequently regularly rely on themselves over trusting God.

About 100 years after the flood, despite God's promises and with the knowledge of God's worldwide judgment not far from their minds, the people declare that they will build a tower to the heavens. **This occurs in spite of God's recurring command** to his people: "*be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*" (**Genesis 9:1**).

» *What reasons may have fueled the people's determination to build this tower?*

» *What fears or desires frequently motivate you?*

» *Why might God be so adamant that these people fill the earth, and how is this command still relevant to the church today?*

In ancient times, **bitumen***, a tar-like substance, was often used as a waterproof sealant.*

God not only sees their active construction, but more importantly, **he sees the wickedness in their hearts**. Much like in **Genesis 1:26**, we get the privilege of a glimpse behind the curtain into the heavenly discourse of the triune God.

» *Why does God declare their unity is a problem?*

» *What does this account reveal to you about the character of God and his desires for his people?*

Our God is not distant. He did not create and then walk away. Throughout Scripture, we repeatedly read of God "*coming down,*"—both in discipline and in love. In this account, he comes down to confuse their language and put an end to their idolatrous pursuit. Suddenly, what had been a peaceful and powerful collaborative effort, becomes an impossibly chaotic and frustrating project.

In Hebrew, "Babel" means **confusion***.*

» *What were the most likely immediate results from God's strategic discipline, and what have been the far-reaching effects of this historic event?*

» *How do God's actions toward these people display his mercy?*

» *When has God disrupted your plans or life, and how can you see God's mercy in your disappointment?*

» *Read* **Acts 2:1-11***: how do you see echoes of* **Genesis 11:1-9** *in this passage?*

As a result of the Lord's judgment, this city is called *Babel*. It will later go on to be known as *Babylon*, a city of great evil and a symbol of those who oppress God's people—making themselves the enemies of God.

» *Spend time asking the Lord where you are "building towers" in your life and what that reveals about your trust in him.*

seeing Jesus

As image bearers, by nature we are aware of the chasm that exists between God and ourselves, and many try to scale that cavern in their own way much like those who attempted to build a tower to heaven. However, there is only one who can bridge the divide for all humanity (**Colossians 1:19–22**); there is only one way to get to God—his name is Jesus (**John 14:6**). In him, we have been reconciled to God, and he has eternally "*seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*" (**Ephesians 2:6**).

At the end of the ages, people from every language under heaven will gather together to worship our King (**Philippians 2:9-11**). There will be no more striving, no more building, and no more confusion. Our voices will join together as we exclaim, "*Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!*" (**Revelation 7:9-10**).

God calls abram

read: **Genesis 12:1–9**

A few hundred years after the people had been dispersed from Babel, the biblical narrative narrows in on one man through whom the promised Son would come—**the Son who would crush the serpent's head** (**Genesis 3:15**).

When we begin to follow Abram, he is 75 years old and living in Haran. Before coming to Haran, he was called by God out of the land of Ur (**Acts 7:2–4**). We also know from Scripture that he descends from Noah's son Shem and that he marries a woman named Sarai who is barren. **He is a pagan man living in a polytheistic culture worshiping false gods and idols** (**Joshua 24:2**).

Canaan, inhabited by the descendants of Noah's son Ham, is the promised land that would one day **be known as *Israel.***

» *Imagine leaving your culture and pagan worship practices to follow the voice of an unknown God. Consider the profound tension Abram must be experiencing.*

» *In what ways is your story similar to Abram's: what was the focus of your life when God called you—or what did he save you from worshiping because he called you to himself when you were young?*

He is not searching for God, but God chooses him despite knowing fully how Abram would repeatedly choose to disobey.

God commands Abram to go…to leave his land, his family, and everything he's ever known to go to a location that is yet to be revealed.

» *What are the promises God makes to Abram?*

» *How do these promises point to God's eternal plan for redemption? How does* ***Galatians 3:8–9*** *confirm this?*

» *Think back to the story of Babel: what similarities and differences do you see in Abram's story here? (****Hebrews 11:8–10****)*

God's covenant with abram

read: **Genesis 15**

Over the course of a decade, Abram's growing relationship with God involves ongoing dialogue; **Abram now knows the voice of God**. This particular interchange begins with the first recorded command from God to "*fear not*."

» *Why might God start with this phrase? What does Abram have to fear?*

» *What about the character of God keeps you from fear or helps you in your fear?*

God makes Abram no small promise when he vows to make him into a great nation. God promises abundance, but Abram understandably questions how God will accomplish this and focuses on his circumstances instead of God's ability to keep his word.

» *How does God address Abram's uncertainty?*

» *When have you doubted God's ability to fulfill his promises, and how can your doubts drive you to the Lord?*

There exists a valid tension between trusting God while also bringing him our questions. In his gracious response, God not only assures Abram that he will have a son of his own, but he gives him a visual to help him grasp the enormity of his promise. Imagine God's love for and patience with Abram as he illuminates his ignorance. And Abram "*believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness*" (**Genesis 15:6**).

» *What does Abram do to be considered righteous by God? What does this mean for you and your own relationship with God?*

» *What does it mean to "believe" God?*

Abram believes God, yet asks for reassurance. In ancient Near Eastern cultures, the sealing of a covenant often involved a cutting ceremony—sacrificial animals would be cut in two and the participants would walk between the carcasses. This symbolized a grave reality: if one party were to break the covenant, he would meet a similar fate.

» *Who does the smoking pot and flaming torch represent?*

» *What is Abram's role in this covenant-cutting ceremony?*

» *What is God showing Abram and us about being in a covenantal relationship with him?*

God is faithful to the covenant he begins, and the responsibility to uphold this covenant falls completely on him alone. **Knowing Abram—and we along with him—could never remain faithful to this covenant, in this ceremony, God is declaring his own Son's death**.

seeing Jesus

As is true with our salvation, God initiated his covenant with Abram based on his own eternal plan and not on anything Abram had done. God is *always* the initiator (**Ephesians 1:3-5**). God made a blood covenant with Abram out of love and for his own divine purposes.

He covenants himself to us through the promised offspring of Abram—Jesus—who took Abram's place in the covenant ceremony by pledging his life in exchange for humanity's unfaithfulness (**Galatians 3:16-18, 26–29**). We are sinful people who could never keep our end of the covenant; therefore, God eternally upholds both ends of the covenant by means of Christ's blood (**Hebrews 9:11–14**).

the God who sees

read: **Genesis 16**

Waiting can be excruciating and can cause us to forget the grandeur and character of God. God had promised Abram innumerable descendants as part of the covenant, but there are three perceived obstacles to this plan: Abram has no children, his wife is barren, and they are both very old. At this point, **it has been at least 10 years since God first made this promise to him**.

» *Imagine being Abram, Sarai, and Hagar: what could they be thinking and feeling, and what mistakes do they each make?*

» *God uses patterns throughout Scripture to reveal truths about Himself and humanity. Where do you see parallels between this chapter and the fall narrative in* **Genesis 3***?*

Here I have seen one who sees me!

Genesis 16:13 (NET)

Hagar flees to the wilderness **where she is met by the angel of the Lord**—his first recorded appearance. He gives her a promise similar to Abram's and announces that she is to name her son Ishmael, which means *God hears*. In a response of worship, Hagar becomes the only person in Scripture to give the Lord a name: *the God who sees*.

» *Who is the angel of the Lord, and what does this interaction reveal about God's heart for Hagar?*

» *What does God tell Hagar to do? What does he reveal about her son's future?*

» *In spite of her circumstances, why might her response to God be worship?*

» *How have you felt seen by God in the midst of difficulty? How has that impacted your worship?*

the sign of the covenant

read: **Genesis 17:1–18:15**

Thirteen years have passed since the last recorded word from the Lord. Ishmael is now a young teen and likely Abram assumes he is the son God had promised. However, the Lord again appears to Abram, now called *Abraham*, with **an expanded revelation of the promise he had given him 25 years earlier**. Abraham is 99 years old, yet God promises specifically that Sarah will give birth to a son a year later whom they are to name *Isaac*.

» *What are the additional details God gives about the promises of the covenant? (Compare* **Genesis 12:1–3** *and* **17:4–8***)*

» *God gives both Abram and Sarai new names; what is the significance of God renaming individuals?*

In this exchange between Abraham and God, God imposes one requirement on Abraham and his people: every male must be circumcised as a reminder of the covenant God made with Abraham. Abraham is obedient to this painful and unprecedented command of the Lord—**as the Lord had cut covenant with Abraham, so Abraham is to cut covenant with the Lord**, both he and all the males in his household throughout all generations.

» *Why might circumcision be the covenantal sign God chooses for Abraham and his descendants?*

» *Abraham cries out to the Lord on behalf of Ishmael. Why could Ishmael never be the son promised to Abraham?*

God visits Abraham once more, but this time he brings along two other unnamed individuals. Abraham shows them hospitality, and **the Lord once again reiterates his promise** to give him a son, Isaac—which Sarah overhears.

» *How does Sarah respond to this promise and why?*

» *What does Abraham and Sarah's story reveal to you about waiting on the Lord and his timing?*

seeing Jesus

In this narrative, we see the angel of the Lord for the first time in Scripture. At a well, he intentionally met Hagar, the pregnant Egyptian slave rejected by her mistress. Many centuries later, at another well, Jesus intentionally engaged with a scandalous Samaritan woman who had been rejected by society. In this conversation, for the very first time, he revealed he is the promised Son—the Messiah (**John 4:1–26**).

The entire Old Testament echoes the refrain that there is a promised Son coming—the one who will crush the head of the serpent and reconcile us to God forever. For hundreds upon hundreds of years, God's people waited in darkness to receive the light of life in Christ Jesus (**Isaiah 9:2, John 1:4–5**). In this light, we are truly seen and fully known by the one who circumcises our hearts that we may know and love him (**Colossians 2:11–14**).

isaac

read: **Genesis 21:1–21**

God is always faithful to his promises. He especially enjoys working in the seemingly impossible. It's been over 25 years since Abraham was promised a child; now, at the age of 100, he holds his baby boy, Isaac. His waiting has ended; his faith has become sight.

» *What could God desire to accomplish in Abraham and Sarah's waiting?*

» *Where in this passage do you see God's faithfulness?*

» *In what ways are you currently waiting on the Lord, and how can their story increase your trust in God's faithfulness while you wait?*

Sarah had laughed bitterly at the absurdity of God's promise that she would bear a son at such an advanced age. Now she is laughing out of joy and gladness with the Lord's fulfillment of his promise. Isaac, whose name means *he laughs*, is here at long last—and he has been worth the wait.

Yet, when Isaac is weaned as a young child, Sarah sees Ishmael, now in his late teens, laughing at him, and she demands that Abraham cast out both Ishmael and Hagar.

» *Read **Galatians 4:28–31**: what concerns might Sarah be having about Ishmael's interactions with Isaac?*

» *Why might God tell Abraham to follow through on Sarah's demand?*

» *How do we see God's compassionate love toward Hagar and Ishmael?*

Abraham has lived his faith and life imperfectly, yet God has not been surprised by his sin or moral failures. **Thankfully, God's faithfulness is never dependent upon man's obedience, but only always on God's own unchanging character.**

abraham's faith tested

read: **Genesis 22:1–19**

In this passage, ***love* is mentioned for the first time in Scripture** as God instructs Abraham to take his only son, whom he loves, and sacrifice him as a burnt offering. God tells Abraham to do the unthinkable, yet unlike when he appeared to Abraham promising to make him into a great nation, Abraham does not question God this time.

» *Isaac is to be the son through whom Abraham's innumerable descendants will come—including the Son who will crush the serpent. Why might God ask something so inconceivable and illogical of Abraham?*

Having promised the servants that ***they* would worship God and *they* would return**, Abraham and Isaac ascend the mountain together. Abraham is well over 100 years old, and although scholars disagree on Isaac's age, we know he was strong enough to carry his own wood up the mountain and old enough to understand the necessary elements for a sacrifice.

» *What might be going on in Isaac's mind as he walks with his father?*

» *What questions might Abraham be asking God as he walks out his obedience?*

After a three-day journey, they reach the mountain in the land of Moriah, and Abraham prepares to follow through in obedience—his heart likely breaking as he considers his next move. We have the benefit of knowing how the story ends; however, in real time, **Abraham has no guarantee other than that of God's character**.

» *How does **Hebrews 11:17–19** give us insight into Abraham's thought process?*

» *What about God's character makes Abraham believe Isaac will return down the mountain with him?*

» *Why might God, who is all-knowing, have tested Abraham's faith like this?*

» *How does this account help you more deeply grasp the significant cost of salvation?*

seeing Jesus

God's command for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac is a vivid foreshadowing of Christ and his crucifixion. Abraham tells Isaac, "*God will provide for himself the lamb*," and the Lord provided a ram—an adult male sheep—to be the sacrifice in Isaac's place (**John 1:29**). Centuries later, on this same mountain range, God indeed provided himself as the promised sacrificial lamb (**Revelation 5:12**).

God is always faithful to his promises. Abraham waited for a son, all of Israel waited for a Son, and even now, we are waiting for the return of the Son. Jesus came in the flesh to bear the death penalty we deserved (**Hebrews 9:27–28**). He became the Lamb of God for us all.

jacob and esau

read: **Genesis 25:19–28**

When Isaac is 40 years old, he marries a woman from his father's family named Rebekah who is barren. He is now in the same quandary his parents had once faced.

» *Isaac likely knew the story of his own miraculous birth; how might that impact the fervency of his prayers and his confidence in God's ability to answer them?*

After 20 years of marriage, Rebekah is pregnant with not one, but two sons! Her unsettling pregnancy is a foreshadowing of what is to come for these two brothers.

» *What does the Lord reveal to Rebekah about her sons?*

» *God chooses to set Jacob over his older brother Esau before the boys are even born (**Romans 9:10–13**). What does this show us about the role of human effort in God's divine purposes?*

God sets a precedent throughout Scripture of subverting the cultural norm of elevating the firstborn son by choosing Isaac and now Jacob, **according to his sovereign will**, to be heirs of his covenantal promises. The truth is, no one deserves to be chosen by God; it is all unmerited grace.

the birthright

read: **Genesis 25:29–34**

Although Esau is the firstborn, each son is wrongly favored by one parent. Typically, the firstborn son would be given the birthright; this signified preeminence above any sons born after him. **He traditionally received a double portion of the inheritance**, which for Esau would include all God had promised Abraham through the covenant (**Genesis 17:7–8**).

However, Esau is more concerned with his immediate need than his future inheritance; Jacob is happy to take advantage of his ambivalence and his physical hunger.

» *Why do you think Esau places so little value on his birthright?*

» *Read **Ephesians 1:3–14**: what spiritual blessings do we have in Christ? And what most frequently causes you to disregard this inheritance?*

the blessing

read: **Genesis 27**

While the birthright was a legal and practical means to care for the family after the father's death, **the blessing was more prophetic and spiritual in its significance.** Although anyone could receive a blessing, culturally the greater blessing was reserved for the firstborn.

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Romans 11:29

After eating his stew, Esau likely gives little thought to what he had done until decades later when the time comes for Isaac to bless his sons who are now in their seventies. In the ancient Near East, **this blessing given by the father** was not a nice but empty gesture—rather it was seen as inspired by God himself, and therefore irrevocable.

Isaac unknowingly gives Jacob the blessing he intended to give Esau. What had started with exchanging a birthright for a meal, became exchanging a meal for the blessing of that birthright. **There was no undoing what had happened**.

- *What reasons might Rebekah have for wanting to deceive her own husband?*
- *Consider the details of this deceptive plan: what similarities do you see to stories we have previously studied?*
- *What do these similarities show us about God and mankind? And how have you seen these patterns in your own life?*
- *Every individual in this narrative suffers; what do they each lose and why?*

Jacob receives the blessing from Isaac, but not because he deserves it. Much like Esau, he sinned grievously against both God and others. However, **God never lets our sin thwart his plan; he redeems even our sin for his sovereign purposes**.

In **Genesis 32:28**, Jacob is renamed *Israel* by God himself, which means "*God prevails*." Even though his life would continue to be marked by sinfulness, through Israel's line would one day come the promised Son: our Redeemer.

seeing Jesus

Although Jesus is the second Adam (**1 Corinthians 15:45–47**), he is appointed as the firstborn of all creation (**Colossians 1:15**); he is the preeminent Son who has been given the birthright and the blessing. If we are in him—in our union with Christ—we receive the promised blessing and inheritance of the firstborn, as well (**1 Peter 1:3–4**). This birthright is not something we could ever earn or even deserve on our own. We cannot deceive our heavenly Father into giving us a blessing—and our birthright can never be lost or stolen or sold (**Romans 8:38–39**). It is eternally guaranteed to us in Christ through the Holy Spirit (**2 Corinthians 1:21–22**).

joseph

read: **Genesis 37, 39–41**

Over the next 30 years, Jacob fathers 12 sons, by four women, and repeats the sin of his father by choosing a favored son, Joseph. **Favoritism breeds contempt among siblings**.

Joseph's youthful arrogance in telling his brothers his dreams, combined with their disdain for him, drives them to murderous schemes. First they plan to kill him, but instead decide to sell him to a group of Ishmaelites traveling down to Egypt.

» *Imagine being Joseph in this dire situation: to which aspects of God's character would you be clinging?*

» *How do the actions of Jacob's sons toward him mirror Jacob's own deceptive actions toward his father, Isaac (**Genesis 27**)?*

Even in this hopeless and seemingly impossible situation, **God's word repeatedly tells us, "*the Lord was with Joseph*"** (**Genesis 39:2**). The presence of the Lord in Joseph's life brings increased opportunities and favor for Joseph with his captors. In this very dark place, Joseph consistently honors God by doing the right thing, yet his suffering increases.

» *How does the life of Joseph challenge your ideas of God's goodness amidst human suffering?*

» *How has God used your suffering to demonstrate his love for you?*

Sold into slavery at the age of 17, **Joseph lives the rest of his days in Egypt**, including several years in prison. While in captivity, he interprets the dreams of two fellow prisoners who then forget about him once released. However, instead of being defined by his hopelessness, **Joseph maintains his confidence in the Lord**—and the Lord never leaves him.

» *In what ways do we see Joseph's steadfast faith in action despite his circumstances?*

» *Does knowing God is always with you provide assurance and peace in uncertain times? Why or why not?*

It is another two years before God gives Pharaoh dreams that need interpreting, causing the cupbearer to finally remember Joseph. After 13 years of slavery, at the age of 30, Joseph likely never expects to suddenly be elevated to Pharaoh's second-in-command.

» *What does Joseph's exaltation show us about God's timing and sovereignty?*

The famine spreads to the entire region, including Canaan where Joseph's family still lives. **All the world must go to Egypt for grain, including Joseph's older brothers**. When they meet Joseph, he knows exactly who they are, but they are unaware of his true identity. Through a series of encounters, Joseph tests their integrity to see if they have changed. Finally, he determines it is time to make himself known to all his brothers.

reconciliation and redemption

read: **Genesis 45–46, 49–50**

Despite the unfathomable heartache Joseph suffered at the hands of his brothers, **he chooses forgiveness and reconciliation** instead of vengeance and retaliation. Now his brothers must return to Canaan to bring their father and families to Egypt.

» *Consider Joseph's growth throughout this narrative: how is he able to forgive his brothers after all the wrong they have done to him?*

» *In what ways does he prove he has truly forgiven them?*

» *In what ways does Joseph foreshadow Christ and the gospel?*

As for you, you meant evil against me, **but God meant it for good**, *to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*

Genesis 50:20

God redeems: **he will use the most hopeless situations for our good and his glory**—and even to save an entire nation. Joseph steadfastly trusts the God who has been with him throughout his life, and he remains confident that sometime after his death, God will lead the Israelites back to their promised land (**Genesis 50:25**).

» *How does the story of Joseph's life repeat themes from earlier biblical stories we have studied?*

» *What has God revealed to you about his multifaceted character and his seamless story as you've spent time in Genesis?*

seeing Jesus

Hundreds of years after Joseph was taken from his home and brought to slavery in Egypt, the Son of God willingly left his home in glory to be confined to human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ (**2 Corinthians 8:9**). Like Joseph, Jesus remained faithful in the face of temptation (**Hebrews 4:15**), and he, too, was betrayed by his own people, enduring unfathomable suffering at the hands of sinful men (**Mark 15:9-15**).

By the divine will of the triune God, Christ willingly went to the cross and was crucified, saving his brothers from death (**Acts 2:23-24**, **Hebrews 2:17–18**). God forgives us completely in Christ and reconciles us to himself, not for this life only, but for all eternity, and he will be faithful to bring us home to our eternal promised land (**Philippians 3:20-21**).

threads

the exodus & the wilderness

exodus–deuteronomy

As you interact with the Scriptures in each section, keep these three questions at the forefront of your mind:

- *What **observations** have you made while reading this Scripture?*
- *What **questions** come to mind as you continue to process what you've read?*
- *What do you see about God that causes your heart to **worship**?*

the birth of moses

read: **Exodus 1–2**

According to the sovereign plan of God, all the people of Israel settle in Egypt during the famine, and in this new land, **they are fruitful and multiply greatly in accordance with the creation mandate** (**Genesis 1:28**). But with the death of Joseph eventually comes the death of the Israelites' protected status under subsequent kings. After a few hundred years, as their numbers increase greatly from the 70 who first entered Egypt, **the new pharaoh begins to see them as a formidable threat**.

In ancient Egypt, the pharaoh typically wore **a headdress adorned with a serpent** *symbolizing his royalty and presumed divine authority.*

Since the promise of **Genesis 3:15**, many Hebrew women likely lived with wonder and hope that they might be the one to give birth to the son who would crush the head of the serpent. Now Satan uses the Egyptian king in his ongoing desire to thwart God's plan.

» *How does Pharaoh's evil plot reflect the schemes of Satan in his hatred toward God and God's eternal plan to send a redeemer?*

Pharaoh makes the execution of his plan the responsibility of two Hebrew women. However, these midwives do not follow through, but instead, risk their own lives in an attempt to save the lives of many babies. As the serpent had deceived the woman in **Genesis 3**, these two women now boldly deceive this serpent king.

» *Given this situation, what choices would you be contemplating?*

» *In addition to saving the children, why do the midwives choose to disobey Pharaoh's order?*

» *How does God respond to the midwives?*

Imagine the desperation and hopelessness felt by the Israelites. **Yet the wicked heart of Pharaoh could never obstruct the plans of God for his people**. God is faithful to preserve a remnant for his purposes: while Pharaoh commands that all male Israelite babies be drowned, the story quickly narrows in on **one particular baby boy**. Against the decree of Pharaoh, Moses' mother chooses to hide him for as long as she can.

» *Contrast the character of Pharaoh with that of his daughter: consider her response to this Hebrew baby in light of his response to the growing Hebrew population.*

» *What are the many ways you see the Lord's hand in the life of Moses and his mother in these chapters?*

Moses' mother could never have imagined how **God's divine sovereignty would orchestrate her circumstances** to soothe her deepest heartache as she is given the privilege of caring for her baby. When Moses is fully weaned, likely at the age of three or four, his mother returns him to Pharaoh's daughter to grow up in the household of Pharaoh.

Moses is raised in this royal Egyptian household until the age of 40, but his heart is still for his Hebrew brothers and sisters in bondage. **He takes it upon himself to intervene** when he sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew.

» *Read **Acts 7:20-29**: what motivates Moses to take action against this Egyptian?*

In fear for his life, Moses flees to Midian. Three hundred miles away from the palace, Moses marries the daughter of a Midianite priest and builds a life tending his father-in-law's sheep for the next 40 years.

» *From Hebrew baby to Egyptian prince to fugitive shepherd, how is God using every stage of Moses' life to prepare him to rescue his people?*

The Hebrew people continue to suffer hardship at the hands of the Egyptians with no earthly leader to advocate or look out for them. **But God is not unaware**: he hears, he remembers, he sees, and he knows.

» *According to **Exodus 2:24–25**, what does God "remember" and why does this cause him to act?*

» *How is it comforting that God also intimately knows you and your story?*

» *Spend time with the Lord in thanksgiving, reflecting on his sovereign hand throughout your life.*

seeing Jesus

Both Moses and Jesus were born under foreign oppression and saved by the acts of faithful individuals who refused the evil orders of ruthless men (**Matthew 2:7–15**). They were also both born to mothers who would have to give up their sons. As the adopted son of a king, Moses chose to be identified with his people; Jesus is the King who humbled himself to be with us so that we can become adopted sons and daughters of God (**Galatians 4:4–5**). We are now co-heirs with this King (**Romans 8:16–17**) and will reign with him forever (**Revelation 5:9–10**). From prince of heaven (**Isaiah 9:6**) to good shepherd (**John 10:11**) to divine rescuer (**2 Timothy 4:18**), Jesus leads us to our promised land (**2 Peter 3:13**).

moses meets God

read: **Exodus 3:1–4:17**

God often meets us in the ordinary if we are paying attention. Moses is not anticipating **a life-altering encounter with God** when he goes out to shepherd his father-in-law's sheep. God uses a burning bush to grab his attention and then proceeds to make himself known to this man who will become his representative to the people.

» What might God be communicating about himself by appearing as a flame of fire that does not consume the bush?

Although God comes in a powerful display of holiness, instead of trusting God, Moses responds to God's command to lead his people out of bondage with a myriad of excuses.

Our God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 12:29

» *What concerns does Moses express, and why might he be so reluctant to obey the voice of the Lord?*

» *How does God respond to Moses' objections? What does this show you about the character of God?*

» *What does God mean by declaring himself to be the* "I AM"*?*

» *What excuses do you most frequently use with the Lord? With these in mind, ask him to reveal how his sufficiency is greater than your human limitations.*

Feeling scared and unqualified, Moses, at the age of 80, along with his older brother, Aaron, returns to Egypt and appears before Pharaoh **in obedience to God's command**.

In **Exodus 5:2**, when Moses delivers the Lord's command to let his people go, Pharaoh retorts, *"Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go."* **The Lord will not tolerate the belittling of his authority** and responds with demonstrations of his miraculous power.

the plagues

read: **Exodus 7:1–10:29**

Moses goes before Pharaoh with a sign to prove that he speaks for God, but Pharaoh is unimpressed and solicits his magicians to replicate the sign. Scripture records that Pharaoh's heart is hardened (**Exodus 7:13**). God does not act against Pharaoh's will; rather God strengthens Pharaoh's heart according to what it most desires (**Romans 1:24–25**). **One man's hard heart toward God has repercussions that reverberate throughout all of Egypt**.

» *What are some clear indications of Pharaoh's hardened heart toward God?*

» *How is God using Pharaoh's hard heart to accomplish his purposes?*

» *When has your heart been defiant in response to the Lord's voice?*

What follows this initial rejection is the fury of God poured out on the land of Egypt in the form of plagues. God uses **blood, frogs, gnats, flies, the death of livestock, boils, hail, locusts, and darkness** to show his supremacy over the Egyptian gods (**Exodus 12:12**) and to send a clear message to Pharaoh and all the people of the land.

- *What is God trying to communicate through the plagues?*
- *Put yourself in the story and consider how each of these nine plagues could have impacted the people, the nation, and creation as a whole.*
- *What do the plagues reveal about God's justice, mercy, and sovereignty?*

Despite all the destruction and devastation, Pharaoh continues to double down on his resistance and arrogance toward the God who continues to powerfully display his might against Pharaoh's prideful disobedience. **God is deathly serious about his glory**—his people will be set free for his name's sake.

seeing Jesus

Jesus is the I AM—the eternally self-existent one (**John 8:56–58**). He is the perfectly obedient rescuer who came to free his people from slavery to sin and shield them, and us, from the coming wrath of God (**1 Thessalonians 5:9**). While the plagues were a one-time occurrence that displayed God's power against evil, God's wrath still remains for those who are opposed to him (**Ephesians 2:1–3**). However, Jesus, in his crucifixion, fully absorbed the wrath we deserved for our rebellion (**Ephesians 2:4–7**), and God will never change his mind concerning those who are his in Christ (**Romans 11:29**).

As a result of Christ's finished work and ascension (**John 16:7**), the Holy Spirit descended on the early believers, appearing as flames of fire (**Acts 2:1–4**). This began the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit for all who are in Christ (**John 14:16–17**). The Holy Spirit softens hearts to respond to God with obedience and surrender (**Ezekiel 36:26–28**) as we wait for the return of our eternal Rescuer (**2 Timothy 4:18**).

the final plague

read: **Exodus 11–12**

God executes nine separate plagues to demonstrate the futility of resisting his power and authority, yet Pharaoh still does not relent.

The final plague comes with detailed requirements for the Israelites to follow in order to avoid being personally devastated by the coming judgment. However, **in order to spare every firstborn son, death is still required**. A perfect, spotless, one-year-old male lamb was to be brought into their homes, live with them for four days, and then be slaughtered in his innocence in order for the sons to be saved.

» *What additional instructions does God give his people about this last plague?*

» *In what ways do the commands regarding the Passover lamb parallel the greater reality of the future Lamb of God?*

God promises his people that this final plague will pass over them if they trust his word and obey his instructions. This would be such a pivotal moment in Israel's history and understanding of God that **he also establishes this Passover as a feast to be celebrated every year** "*as a statute forever*" (**Exodus 12:14**).

» *Why might the Lord want them to commemorate this event every year?*

» *Read **Luke 22:14–20**: how is the Passover related to communion and our remembrance of what Christ accomplished on the cross?*

The Lord is always true to his word—he can't not be—so, as he had forewarned, the Lord sweeps through the land and kills every firstborn son—both man and animal—whose door had not been covered by the blood of the lamb.

This final blow sends Pharaoh into a hurried desperation to rid Egypt of the Israelites permanently. He sees God's people as the source of his problem, not his hardened heart in rebellion toward God.

» *Consider **Genesis 15:13–14** and **Exodus 3:20–22**: what evidence does God give of his foreknowledge long before the Egyptians drive the Israelites from their land?*

» *How can the reality of God's foreknowledge impact how you view all of life?*

the red sea

read: **Exodus 13:17–14:31**

Jacob's family of 70 had gone into Egypt under Joseph to survive the famine. More than 400 years later, they have become a nation of well over a million people who are fleeing out of Egypt in order to save their lives (**Exodus 12:37**). Not only is this multitude made up of an **inconceivable number of Israelites**, but it now includes Egyptians and other foreigners who would dwell among God's people (**Exodus 12:38**).

The Lord, in his kindness, leads them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to the Red Sea—approximately a three-day journey. The people are incredibly fickle toward both God and Moses; stuck between the Red Sea and the advancing Egyptians, they cannot make sense of their circumstance.

» *How does your lack of clarity influence your ability to trust God?*

» *What are all the ways you see God's power and faithfulness in the deliverance of his people out of Egypt?*

In a relatively short amount of time, Moses goes from a frightened man full of excuses, to a bold leader and prophet of God.

» *Similar to Moses, where have you seen God increase your faith and obedience?*

The same water that the Israelites were saved through becomes the judgment of the Egyptians. *"Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore"* (**Exodus 14:30**).

» *Ultimately, why does the Lord lead the Israelites to the Red Sea?*

God is a deliverer of his people; he delivers us from our sins and delivers the Israelites from Egypt. This deliverance becomes a recurring reminder from God to his people of his grace and compassion as they continue to ebb and flow in their affection and obedience to him.

» *In light of all you've seen in Exodus so far, what are you celebrating about God's character and plan for salvation?*

seeing Jesus

In **Luke 22**, we see Jesus observe this same Passover meal with his disciples on the night of his arrest. But instead of celebrating the blood of a lamb that saved them from death in Egypt, he ushered in the new covenant and declared himself to *be* the Lamb whose blood would save his people from their sins (**1 Corinthians 11:23–26**).

Jesus is the firstborn Son and the perfect, spotless Passover Lamb (**John 1:29**; **1 Peter 1:18–19**). It is his blood that cleanses us from our sins (**1 John 1:9**), liberates us from captivity (**Luke 4:17–21**). One day, God promises that he will judge the whole world and only those who cling to the cross of Christ and are covered by his blood will be passed over in the final judgment (**Romans 5:9**). We trust in his blood alone to cover us and in his Spirit to lead us from this life to our eternal promised land.

God provides

read: **Exodus 15:22–17:7**

The Israelites have finally and completely been set free from the Egyptians; their slavery is a thing of the past. However, that does not mean their life is now one of ease. **The Lord leads them into the wilderness where they will encounter a number of hardships**.

After a three-day journey, with the Red Sea behind them, the water they once feared would kill them from its abundance, they now fear will kill them due to its absence. They cry out to Moses who then cries out to the Lord on their behalf.

» *What insights does the Lord give his people about himself while they are in Marah?*

Despite the Lord's recent faithfulness and provision of water, **the people begin to grumble** against Moses because they are hungry. They become driven by their physical desperation instead of their faith in God's goodness.

» *The Israelites come to Moses with many complaints. What do their complaints reveal about the lies they are believing?*

In spite of their grumbling, **the Lord provides bread from heaven in order to feed his people**. But there are specific stipulations for how and when they are to collect this bread.

» *What conditions does God give for the collection of bread and why?*

» *For how long do the Israelites depend on the daily bread from the Lord?*

» *Read* ***Deuteronomy 8:2–3*** *and consider how God's daily provision of manna parallels our daily need for God's word.*

The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Mark 2:27

In the creation narrative, God rested from his work on the seventh day as both a pattern and an invitation; here God establishes the Sabbath as a gift for people who had daily been driven to work as slaves in Egypt for generations. On the Sabbath they were to **cease from work and rest in their God as provider and sustainer**.

» *Imagine leaving a lifetime of slavery and now being commanded to rest. How difficult might it be for the Israelites to implement this new practice? Yet what does this command reveal about the heart of God?*

» *How difficult is it for you to freely rest in the finished work of the Lord?*

The Israelites once again find themselves in the wilderness without water and are quick to bring their grievances to Moses.

» *How does the Israelites' grumbling distort their view of God and reality?*

» *In what ways have you seen grumbling impact your life?*

» *What might God be cultivating in his people through their hardships?*

amalek attacks

read: **Exodus 17:8–16**

God remains steadfastly with his people and provides for both their internal needs as well as their external protection.

These Israelites had spent years in slavery. They are likely strong from forced physical labor, but they are not trained fighters, having never been in battle. **Yet God provides powerfully for his people in their weakness**.

Amalek, descended from Esau, attacks them from behind, starting with the slowest and weakest (**Deuteronomy 25:17–19**). They are the first enemy to come upon the Israelites after they leave Egypt, and God does not tolerate this unprovoked attack.

» *What is the significance of Moses' stance during the battle?*

» *In what ways do Aaron and Hur provide critical assistance to Moses, and ultimately Israel, in this battle? Who in your life has been a God-given help in times of struggle?*

God promises to one day do away with the Amalekites so they will no longer even be a memory on the earth. **When God defeats an enemy, he defeats them completely**. Moses then builds an altar in response to the Lord's victory in this battle.

» *Throughout these three chapters, what is God showing us both about his character and about humanity?*

seeing Jesus

We see in **1 Corinthians 10:4** that Christ is the rock from whom the Israelites drank in the wilderness. Jesus declares himself to be the living water (**John 7:37–38**), and if we drink of him we will never thirst again (**John 4:10–15**). He is the fountain of life that eternally satisfies. Jesus is also the bread of life come down from heaven whose body was broken for us as he ushered in the new covenant (**John 6:48–51**).

Like the Israelites, we too have an enemy who attacks us in our weakness. Moses served as a mediator for the Israelites before God; Jesus, our perfect mediator, is interceding for us, praying that we would remain strong in faith and in our battle against sin and the devil (**Hebrews 7:25**). In his death and resurrection, Jesus destroyed the power of Satan, and one day we will see our enemy destroyed completely (**Hebrews 2:14–15**). When we finally stand in the presence of Jesus our King, the works of the enemy in our lives will no longer even be a memory (**Isaiah 65:17**, **Revelation 21:4**).

covenant at sinai

read: **Exodus 19**

In the third month of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites come to a mountain known as Sinai, where they will remain for a little over a year. God references different mountains throughout Scripture—each with its own story and purpose—and this mountain is one Moses is uniquely familiar with; it is also referred to as Mount Horeb.

» *Why is Mount Horeb significant (**Exodus 3:10–12**)?*

» *What could God be showing Moses by bringing him to this particular mountain?*

On this mountain, God speaks to Moses, establishing a covenant with him and the people. **This covenant is in addition to the one God had established with Abraham** (**Genesis 15**). The Abrahamic covenant is unconditional because God bears the full responsibility to uphold it. Whereas, in this Mosaic covenant the people are active participants.

I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. **Therefore choose life,** *that you and your offspring may live...that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers.*

Deuteronomy 30:19–20

» *What does God promise will be true of the people, and what are the conditions of this promise (**Exodus 19:5–6**)?*

Moses is God's chosen mediator with his people, the Israelites. **Initially, only Moses is allowed to ascend the mountain and talk with God**; all others will die if they so much as touch this mountain.

» *Why does God put such severe restrictions on who or what can be in his presence?*

» *Contrast the Israelites' access to God with the access we now have to this same God in Christ (**Hebrews 12:18–24**)?*

the ten commandments

read: **Exodus 20:1–23**

God delivers a message to Moses that he is to relay to the people. This message is the voice of the Lord to his people regarding their responsibility within the covenant. Out of his love for them, God gives ten commandments that are to define his children. **These commandments are a gift, for in them we see the heart and character of God**.

» *Looking at **Exodus 20:2**, why does God preface the giving of the ten commandments with this reminder?*

» *How does the focus differ between the first four commandments and the last six commandments?*

» *How is this emphasis echoed in the New Testament (**Matthew 22:36-40**)?*

» *What does each commandment reveal to us about the nature of God?*

And by this we know that **we have come to know him**, *if we keep his commandments.*

1 John 2:3

the blood of the covenant

read: **Exodus 24**

Moses delivers the commandments and terms of this covenant. As their mediator, he seals the covenant between God and the people with the blood of an oxen (**Leviticus 17:11**). Moses is given a weighty assignment in leading over a million people through the wilderness. God, in his kindness, eases Moses' burden of leading these people by appointing Aaron, Aaron's sons, and 70 elders to serve alongside Moses.

» *How does Moses confirm this covenant? Why is this significant (**Hebrews 9:19-22**)?*

» *The people declare, "all that the Lord has spoken we will do," but they repeatedly fail. Why? How do you see similar struggles in your own obedience?*

Covenants were commonly sealed by the sharing of a meal between the two parties. Scripture records that Moses and these appointed men went up and "*saw the God of Israel... they beheld God, and ate and drank*" (**Exodus 24:10-11**).

Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!

Luke 14:15

seeing Jesus

Jesus is the perfect mediator between God and humanity (**1 Timothy 2:5**), and the mediator of the covenant to which every other covenant has been pointing (**Hebrews 8:6–13**). On the night he was betrayed, the disciples ate and drank with him as he declared that he was ushering in a new covenant. This covenant was sealed by *his* blood which was poured out for us, and by it we are made clean (**Matthew 26:28**).

Because of this new covenant, those of us who are in Christ are unconditionally "*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession*" (**1 Peter 2:9**). And as his chosen people, we will eat and drink with him at the marriage supper of the Lamb in the presence of our God (**Revelation 19:6–9**).

the golden calf

read: **Exodus 31:18–32:35**

God covenanted the Israelites to himself as his people in Sinai. He had, in essence, joined himself to them in marriage, **knowing full well how often they would prove to be unfaithful to him**.

Moses ascends the mountain numerous times during the Israelites' time at Sinai. On this occasion, Moses, along with his assistant Joshua, are on the mountain with God and receive the tablets of the testimony written by God himself—the ten commandments which the Lord had previously spoken to his people (**Exodus 20:1–17**).

During this 40-day period, **Moses leaves the people in the hands of his brother Aaron**.

» *What motivates the people to demand that Aaron make gods for them? What does this reveal about their hearts?*

» *Why are our hearts so drawn to idolatry, and why is this so offensive to God?*

Exodus 32:7-14 reveals a conversation between God and Moses in which we see the severity of God's anger toward the Israelites' idolatry. He will not overlook the unfaithfulness of his stiff-necked people.

» *What does God propose to Moses, and what might be God's underlying purposes in this interaction?*

» *Why does Moses remind God of his own character and promises? How can we apply this as a model for our own conversations with God?*

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, **that he should change his mind**.

Numbers 23:19

Moses descends the mountain to find the people just as God told him: reveling in the worship of their idol. **God's commands were given to set them apart** from the pagan nations for the sake of his holy name and character, yet their flagrant unfaithfulness is on full display.

At the sight of this, Moses throws down the tablets on which God had inscribed the commandments of his covenant. **Moses breaks the tablets just as the people had broken covenant with God**.

» *Recall the specifics of the ten commandments: which of these commandments did the people break in this passage?*

» *What are the consequences of their unfaithfulness, and what do these consequences reveal about God?*

» *Contrast the leadership of Moses and Aaron. What differences do you observe in both their actions and their concern for the people?*

Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, "This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt," and had committed great blasphemies,
you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness.

Nehemiah 9:18–19

the glory of God

read: **Exodus 33:1-34:9**

The time comes for them to prepare to leave Sinai. The Lord tells Moses and the people that he will send an angel and provide for them, but because of their unfaithfulness, he himself will not go with them. The people respond with repentance and mourning; they realize **the blessings of God without the presence of God are not what they truly desire**.

Once again, Moses intercedes for the people, and God promises to go with them and give them rest. **Exodus 33:7–11** describes a previous pattern of Moses' interactions with God. **He has come to know the Lord intimately**, but as much as he knows about God, he still wants more. He says to the Lord, "*Please show me your glory*" (**Exodus 33:18**).

For I the LORD do not change*; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.*

Malachi 3:6

» *According to **Exodus 34:6**, how does God describe himself, and why are these attributes central to his character?*

» *Consider your own desire to know God more. Boldly ask God to show you his glory.*

The people have sinned grievously against the Lord in making the golden calf and yet, in his mercy, he does not blot them out. **God is jealous for the worship of his people** because nothing and no one else is worthy of worship. He is both intensely serious about his holiness and lovingly generous as a Father to his children. **Their sin cannot change him or his faithfulness to his covenant**.

» *Why is it so important that God does not change, and what comfort do you find in this truth?*

seeing Jesus

The Israelites created an image to worship as a god; Jesus is the image of the invisible God (**Colossians 1:15**, **Hebrews 1:3**). Moses was a sinful mediator who interceded on the people's behalf and God withheld his wrath. Jesus is the sinless mediator who took on God's wrath for his people and forever makes intercession for them (**Romans 8:34**). Moses goes before the Lord in hopes of making atonement for the sins of the people; Jesus makes a sure and final atonement with his own life for all who are in him (**Hebrews 10:10–18**). Although, like the Israelites, God disciplines us in our sin (**Hebrews 12:5–6**), he will never break his covenant with us which he has established for all eternity in Christ (**2 Timothy 2:13**).

the tabernacle

read: **Exodus 40**

Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.

Exodus 25:8

Despite the Israelites' idol worship and blatant infidelity in the camp, God delivers instructions to Moses, while still on Mount Sinai, regarding the construction of the tabernacle. The people are to build a portable tent **to be the place where God's glory would dwell with them**—until the temple would be built almost 500 years later (**1 Kings 8**).

God remains faithful in his promise to always be with his people; one of the Bible's recurring themes is ***God with us***.

The tabernacle will be a daily visible reminder of his presence for his doubting people. The innermost part of the tabernacle, the Most Holy Place, is where the very presence of God will dwell. "*I will dwell among the people of Israel and be their God*" (**Exodus 29:45**).

» *As an Israelite living in the wilderness, how might this visible reminder impact you?*

The tabernacle was a tent that sat in a courtyard and contained two distinct areas: **The Holy Place and the Most Holy Place**. These rooms and their furnishings were constructed with gold, silver, brass, jewels, woods, and tapestries. In the design of the tabernacle, there was an intentional increase in the value of the materials used with closer proximity to the Most Holy Place.

Not just anyone could enter God's presence; this increase in precious metals came with a decrease in accessibility—the Lord was very precise about who could come into his presence, including when and in what manner.

» *Where could the Israelites have gotten the materials to build the tabernacle?*

» *Fifty chapters of the Bible speak about the construction and operation of the tabernacle. Why might God dedicate so much of his word to these details?*

the tabernacle elements

The elements and furnishings within the courtyard and tabernacle served both practical purposes as well as conveyed deeply meaningful symbolism.

in the courtyard

- **the altar of burnt offering**: a large, bronze altar used for daily sacrifices required to atone for sin. Fire burned continually on this altar.
- **the basin**: a bronze bowl located before the entrance into the tabernacle used exclusively by the priests for purification of their hands and feet before serving.

in the holy place

- **the lampstand**: a 75-pound tree-shaped candlestick—a menorah—with seven lamps all made of pure gold. As the only source of light in the tabernacle, the lampstand burned continually, casting light across the room onto the table of bread.

- **the table of bread**: a table overlaid with gold containing 12 loaves of bread. These loaves were gathered weekly from the 12 tribes of Israel. Plates, bowls, dishes for incense, and cups for the drink offering were also on the table.
- **the altar of incense**: a golden altar positioned directly in front of the veil leading into the Most Holy Place. The thick colorful curtain embroidered with cherubim restricted access to God's presence; only the High Priest could go beyond it, and only once a year.

in the most holy place

- **the veil**: the Most Holy Place was located behind a veil which separated it from the Holy Place. The thick colorful curtain, embroidered with cherubim, restricted access to God's presence; only the High Priest could go beyond it, and only once a year.
- **the ark of the covenant**: a gold-covered chest made with acacia wood. This box contained the Ten Commandments, a golden urn of manna, and Aaron's staff.
- **the mercy seat**: the cover of the ark of the covenant. There were two golden cherubim on top—one on each end facing one another with their wings hovering over the place where the blood for atonement was sprinkled. The presence of God dwelt above the mercy seat between these two cherubim.

» *God is holy and intentional in all he does. What might he be communicating through each element in the tabernacle?*

the true tabernacle

read: **Hebrews 9**

The author of Hebrews presents many of the Old Testament practices as types and shadows of their heavenly realities. **The Old Testament points us upward to these divine truths and forward to their fulfillment in the new covenant in Christ**. What was true for the tabernacle would eventually be true for the temple as well—things with which the original readers of Hebrews would have been intimately familiar.

seeing Jesus

Reflecting on **Exodus 40** and **Hebrews 9**, in what ways do you see Jesus foreshadowed in the tabernacle and its furnishings?

And the Word became flesh and dwelt [tabernacled] among us.

John 1:14

the law

read: **Leviticus 19:1–18**

The Israelites spend an entire year camped at the base of Mount Sinai. God uses this time to continue **to show them who he is and how they are to honor him** in every area of their lives as they live as his people in his presence.

At Mount Sinai, God communicates **over 600 laws** the people are to follow. These laws stipulate different offerings, sacrifices, and practices that will be a regular part of their lives, as well as the consequences that would occur if a law is not kept. However, **the law was also a grace**—it would provide for the forgiveness of sins, guidance for life, and purity before a holy God so he could dwell with them.

three types of laws

These laws can be understood in three categories: **moral, ceremonial, and civil**:

- **Moral laws reveal the heart and character of God** by defining what he declares right and wrong. These are still applicable truths for believers today. They pertain to sin and how we relate to God and others as we reflect his nature.
- **Ceremonial laws prescribed how unholy people could approach a holy God**. These feasts, festivals, and rituals also distinguished the Israelites from the pagan nations that surrounded them. For the church today under the new covenant, the need to observe these laws has been removed. The blood of Christ purifies us and, united to him, we stand before God holy and clean.
- **Civil laws governed the nation of Israel by providing practical instructions on how to live as God's people**. Many of the principles found in these laws are still useful for believers today but are no longer binding for those in Christ.

- **Moral**: *Leviticus 19:1–4, 11–18*
- **Ceremonial**: *Leviticus 19:5–8*
- **Civil**: *Leviticus 19:9–10*

» *In what ways do these laws reflect God's character?*

» *In light of the ceremonial laws, compare the Israelites' approach to God then with your access to God now in Christ.*

» *What principle from the civil law in this passage can be applied to our lives today?*

why the law?

read: **Galatians 3:5–29**

With the giving of the law, God again covenants himself to his people and this covenant contains responsibilities for both parties: they were to obey him as his people and he would bless them as their God (**Exodus 19:5–6**). Now, on this side of the cross, we see the law in a different light.

» *According to **Galatians 3**, what were the reasons for the law?*

» *How does our union with Christ change our relationship to the law?*

» *What is the danger of measuring our righteousness by obedience to the law, and how do you see this wrestle in your own life?*

Under the law, their lives become an endless cycle of washings, rituals, sacrifices, and offerings. Their sin and human frailty were always before them, yet these laws were also meant to reveal **God's heart for his people and his determination to remain in their midst**.

For Christ is the end of the law *for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

Romans 10:4

day of atonement

read: **Leviticus 16**

Sacrifices were performed every day, **both morning and night**, for the forgiveness of the Israelites' sins (**Exodus 29:38–39**). However, **one day a year was set aside as the Day of Atonement** for the purification of the tabernacle and the covering of the sins of the people. Many ceremonial laws dictated how sacrifices were to be made on this sobering day.

» *What does the Lord require of the high priest to enter behind the veil?*

» *What does Aaron do while in this sacred space?*

Ultimately, the high priest sacrifices a goat as a sin offering for the transgressions of the people. He also confesses the sins of all the Israelites as he lays his hands on the head of another goat—the scapegoat—who is then led out into the wilderness.

» *What might each goat symbolize in our atonement?*

» *We still require the sacrifice of a high priest to redeem us from our sins. With the burden of all these sacrifices in mind, how does* ***Hebrews 9:11–15*** *lead you to worship?*

seeing Jesus

As there was no end to the Israelites' sin, there would be no end to the sacrifices, unless their sin—our sin—could be atoned for in another way (**Leviticus 17:11**). We needed a great high priest who would go before God on our behalf (**Hebrews 2:17**), and we needed a perfect sacrifice to make us right before God and give us a holy identity (**Hebrews 7:26–27**).

Jesus, our sinless sacrificial Lamb (**1 Peter 1:18–21**), was both taken outside the city gate and slaughtered for the removal and atonement of our sins (**Hebrews 13:11–12**). He has fulfilled every law that we could never keep (**Matthew 5:17**), and he will keep us united to himself both now and forever (**Hebrews 10:12–14**).

the twelve spies

read: **Numbers 13**

The wilderness has an end goal; the wandering has a destination. The Israelites have spent close to a year in the wilderness of Mount Sinai where God taught his people his ways and established his covenant with them.

In the second year after having been freed from Egypt, the Israelites now head to the land promised to them by God. They set out from Mount Sinai and travel to the southern border of the promised land. **Their journey appears to be almost over** and the wilderness will soon be a distant memory.

» *Imagine you have wandered and hungered and grumbled in the wilderness, but now you are within arm's reach of the promised land filled with milk and honey and rest. What could be running through your mind at this moment?*

But first, they send in 12 men to spy out the land God is giving them; one man from each tribe of Israel.

» *Read **Deuteronomy 1:19-24**: whose idea is it to spy out the land, and what is likely the motivation for this plan?*

» *With this Deuteronomy passage in mind, what might the Lord be doing in **Numbers 13:1–2**?*

After 40 days, the spies return with a mixed report: **the land is everything God said it would be**—but the spies come back with two very different perspectives.

» *What do the 10 spies report about the land? How does Caleb's account differ?*

» *What does this indicate about how the spies view God?*

» *How can you continue to walk in obedience when faced with real-world obstacles?*

wilderness rebellion

read: **Numbers 14**

Although God has already shown his power and faithfulness repeatedly, in their fear and unbelief, the people come up with a new plan.

» *What is the collective response to the spies' report, and what is their new plan?*

Moses urges the people not to rebel against God, **reminding them of the Lord's promises and goodness**. Instead of repentance, they respond with a shared determination to stone Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua to death. But then the Lord appears and speaks to Moses in the presence of all the people.

For **freedom** *Christ has set us free...do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*

Galatians 5:1

» *How does Moses respond to the Lord, and what does this dialogue reveal about the heart God has been cultivating in him throughout this journey?*

The 10 spies who brought back a bad report about the land meet an immediate fate, but the rest of Israel is spared—for now. However, **God declares they will wander in the wilderness for their rebellion** until every person 20 years of age and older passes away— with the exception of Caleb and Joshua.

» *What is the root of their sin that warrants the discipline they receive? And why is this sin so offensive to God?*

» *After the judgment, what do the people determine to do, and what is the result?*

» *When have you not trusted God to be true to his promises but instead relied on your own understanding and strength?*

As a result of their unbelief and blatant rebellion, what had been an 11-day journey to the edge of the promised land, now becomes a 40–year affliction wandering in the desert (**Deuteronomy 1:2**).

seeing Jesus

Immediately following Jesus' baptism, the Spirit led him into the wilderness for 40 days to be tempted by Satan (**Matthew 4:1–11**). These 40 days parallel the 40 years the Israelites spent in the wilderness. Where they failed to trust and follow God during their testing in the desert, Jesus obeyed God perfectly (**Hebrews 4:15**).

We cannot force our way into the promised land. There is no way to God the Father except through God the Son (**Matthew 11:27**). Because of Jesus, we never have to fear God will disown us or cut us off (**John 6:37**). In Christ we can be sure that our wilderness wanderings will most certainly lead to our eternal promised land.

moses strikes the rock

read: **Numbers 20:1–13; Deuteronomy 3:23–4:14**

The years in the wilderness are finally coming to an end. Overall, the people have maintained the same grumbling disposition as those who left Egypt—**it's just a new generation**. Moses has spent 40 years in the wilderness and watched an entire generation of rebellious Israelites die in the desert.

» *As Moses deals again with a lack of water for the people, how is God's command to him different from the first time he provided water from a rock in* ***Exodus 17:6****?*

» *What are Moses' failures in this instance, what does God say is at the heart of his sin, and what is the resulting consequence?*

He split rocks in the wilderness and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep.

Psalm 78:15

» ***1 Corinthians 10:1–4*** *gives us a wider perspective of the Israelites' journey; with this passage in mind, what is so significant about the rock that God would respond to Moses in this way?*

» *When have you, like Moses, known God's commands, but chosen to disobey?*

The Lord disciplines Moses but he is not done with him. At the age of 120, Moses prepares this next generation of Israelites to enter the promised land by reiterating all God had commanded and promised their people.

Moses will not lead them into the promised land; therefore, he instructs them to teach these things to their children as well, so **God's love and God's law would be known throughout the generations**.

the death of moses

read: **Deuteronomy 34:1-12**

This life is one Moses could have never imagined for himself. From being saved out of the waters of the Nile as a baby, to being called by God from a burning bush at the age of 80, Moses spends his last 40 years living in intimate communion with his Lord.

At the end of his life, Moses is alone with God on yet another mountain. This interaction depicts his final moments on earth and God's fatherly care for his faithful servant.

» *In what ways do you see God's great love and care for Moses in this passage?*

» *How does your heart respond as you imagine yourself alone with God at the end of your life and why?*

» *Read* ***Psalm 90****, written by Moses, in light of all he has experienced and endured. What do you see about God's character that leads you to worship?*

The Israelites' story is **one of deliverance from captivity to freedom in the promised land** and is the most frequently referenced Old Testament account in all of Scripture.

» *Having followed the Israelites' exodus from Egypt through the wilderness and to the edge of the promised land, what most encourages and/or challenges you?*

seeing Jesus

Deuteronomy 34:10 tells us that there would be no other prophet like Moses whom God knew face to face – that is, until the coming of Jesus (**Matthew 21:11**). He is the only one who has truly seen God the Father (**John 1:17–18**), but he assures us that anyone who has seen him has, indeed, seen the Father (**John 14:9**).

Moses said, "The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. **You shall listen to him** *in whatever he tells you."*

Acts 3:22

In his life, Moses was only permitted to see the promised land from afar due to his disobedience. However, several hundred years after his death, Moses stood in the promised land alongside Elijah (**Luke 9:28–31**). These two men, representing the law and the prophets, were sent to speak to Jesus about "*his departure,*" which in Greek is *exodos.*

One day we will stand in our eternal promised land and be welcomed in by our loving heavenly Father with the words "*well done, good and faithful servant*" (**Matthew 25:21**)—not because of our works but because of the works of Christ alone. He is the good and faithful servant and he is God and we are forever secure in him.

threads

joshua to saul's rise

joshua–saul's rise

As you interact with the Scriptures in each section, keep these three questions at the forefront of your mind:

» *What **observations** have you made while reading this Scripture?*

» *What **questions** come to mind as you continue to process what you've read?*

» *What do you see about God that causes your heart to **worship**?*

joshua leads the people

read: **Joshua 1:1-9**

Joshua the son of Nun was **full of the spirit of wisdom***, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses.*

Deuteronomy 34:8–9

Moses, the final member of the older generation (**Numbers 14:28–30**), has died and God has buried him in a location known only to God himself. After 30 days of mourning, the people depart for the promised land under the leadership of Joshua.

At the age of 40 (**Joshua 14:7**), Joshua was one of the two spies who came back from surveying the promised land with a positive report and encouragement to trust the Lord. Now, nearing the age of 80, **having known nothing but Egyptian slavery and wandering in the wilderness**, Joshua is responsible for leading the Israelites into the promised land.

The Lord has promised them the land, but that doesn't mean obtaining it will be easy. They will still have to engage in various battles while living obediently under their covenant with God and trusting he will fulfill his promises.

» *In what ways does the Lord encourage Joshua as he prepares to face the difficult task before him?*

rahab and the spies

read: **Joshua 2:1–24**

As Joshua prepares the people to cross the Jordan River, he sends two spies ahead to view Jericho, the first Canaanite city they are to conquer. These spies encounter help and kindness from an unlikely source: Rahab, a prostitute. She hides these two men from the king of Jericho, and in return, **they vow to preserve her life when the Israelites come to destroy the city**.

» *Why might Joshua have sent spies into Jericho?*

» *What does Rahab declare about God and his people?*

» *Consider the promise connected to the scarlet cord: to which previous biblical narrative does this point and what is the parallel significance of the cord?*

crossing the jordan river

read: **Joshua 3:1–4:24**

The two spies return, reporting that the Lord has surely given them all the land. The next morning, Joshua leads the people to the edge of the Jordan River where they set up camp for three days, and Joshua delivers instructions on how they are to cross over. For many, this will be their first miraculous water crossing; for others, the crossing of the Red Sea would be a substantial but distant memory from their childhood.

» *How is the ark of the covenant symbolically similar here to the pillar that had previously led the Israelites? What does this reveal to us about God?*

» *What are the appointed men instructed to do and for what purpose?*

The men take 12 large stones from the Jordan, and then Joshua sets up 12 different stones in the midst of the Jordan **as a memorial to what the Lord has done for them** in allowing them to cross the waters on dry ground yet again. They entered the wilderness through the parting of the Red Sea and now are leaving the wilderness by way of the Jordan River.

For the Lord will **go before you***, and the God of Israel will* **be your rear guard***.*

Isaiah 52:12

» *According to **Joshua 4:23–24**, why does the Lord dry up both the Red Sea and the Jordan River?*

» *What memorials have you set up to remember what the Lord has done in your life?*

seeing Jesus

As a prophet of God, Moses had declared that God would raise up another prophet like himself from among the Israelites who would speak the words of God (**Deuteronomy 18:18**). Joshua, although a great prophet and messenger of God, was not ultimately the one of whom Moses spoke; Jesus is the prophet from Israel who speaks the words of God (**John 12:49–50**).

Rahab would be saved by God through her faith and obedience. Just as the blood of the lamb on the doorposts served as a protection from the wrath of God in Egypt (**Exodus 12:7-13**), so Rahab's scarlet cord would signal to the conquering Israelite army that they were to pass over her house, sparing her life. Similarly, those of us who are in Christ, who have been covered by his blood, will be saved from the coming judgment and wrath of God (**Romans 5:9**).

As soon as all the kings...heard **that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan** *for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them.*

Joshua 5:1

the fall of jericho

read: **Joshua 6:1-27**

The Israelites are finally on the other side of the Jordan River and have Jericho right in front of them. They set up camp in the plains of Jericho where they receive their instructions for battle. This is the first city God commands them to conquer.

» *Consider the faith and patience required by the Israelites to execute this plan; why might God give them such a unique strategy for conquering the city?*

» *What would have been going through your mind as you marched around Jericho with the Israelites?*

On the seventh day, the Israelites enter the city of Jericho; the Lord is faithful to his promise to give them the land, but **it requires their obedience, even if they don't fully comprehend his ways**.

» *According to **Deuteronomy 18:9–14**, why does God command the Israelites to destroy everything in Jericho?*

» *Imagine the details of this destruction; what thoughts or questions come to mind?*

By the providence and command of God, Rahab and all her household are saved from destruction. This most unlikely woman is not only saved when all in Jericho are lost, but she becomes part of the people of Israel. She marries Salmon from the tribe of Judah and becomes the great-great-grandmother of King David, as **one of five women mentioned in the lineage of Christ**.

» *What does the rescue of Rahab reveal about the scope of God's grace and the intentionality of God's plan?*

Under the leadership of Joshua, the Israelites spend approximately seven years engaging in many military campaigns **to obtain what the Lord promised** would be theirs through these conquests. After the Israelites acquire the land, it is divided as an inheritance among the 12 tribes of Israel—the groups of people descended from Jacob through his 12 sons.

» *According to **Joshua 21:43–45**, in spite of the Israelite's repeated disobedience in the wilderness,, how do we see God's steadfast covenantal faithfulness?*

» *How does God's faithfulness to the Israelites give you hope in your current circumstances?*

So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses. And Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. **And the land had rest from war**.

Joshua 11:23

joshua's final words

read: **Joshua 23:1–24:31**

The people begin to build their lives in their new home, and Joshua delivers a message from the Lord to the leaders of Israel. This message is a reminder of what the Lord has recently done for them and **how they are to live as God's people in God's land**.

» *What are the instructions God gives the people through Joshua?*

» *God gives the Israelites rest from all their surrounding enemies. From what has the Lord promised to give you rest?*

Joshua cautions the people against abandoning the covenant between them and the Lord. Life and land would be theirs as long as they live under the covenant, but there would be consequences if they do not remain faithful to the Lord their God.

» *As Joshua recounts Israel's history, in what ways do we see God's steadfast love toward them? And why is it important to rehearse his faithfulness?*

» *Joshua draws a line in the sand, urging the Israelites to "choose this day whom you will serve" (**Joshua 24:15**). What gods are you most inclined to serve instead of the Lord in your everyday life?*

Throughout his life, Joshua, following the command of the Lord, oversees and executes the destruction of many evil kings and cities—the enemies of God's people. At the age of 110, **having led God's people well**, Joshua dies and is buried in the land of his inheritance.

seeing Jesus

Surpassing Joshua's conquests, Jesus is the triumphant warrior who conquers *all* our enemies (**1 John 3:8**, **Revelation 1:17–18**). He has secured for us a promised land and our eternal inheritance (**1 Peter 1:3–5**). And he is the only one who can give us true and lasting rest (**Hebrews 4:8–10**).

Joshua made a covenant with the people, knowing they would never be able to keep it. God chose us, despite knowing we could never serve and obey him perfectly (**1 John 2:1**). Therefore, Christ, our advocate before the Father, establishes a new covenant with us, whereby he saves us through his perfect life, with his divine love, and for his own purposes (**Hebrews 8:6–7**).

the time of the judges

read: **Judges 2:6–23**

At the end of Joshua's life, the Israelites are living peacefully as 12 tribes in the promised land. Nevertheless, after Joshua and that generation dies, the following generation does not know the Lord or all he had done for Israel.

» *What do we learn about the Lord from this passage?*

» *What does this new generation's unawareness of the Lord and his work imply (**Deuteronomy 6:4–15**)?*

The Israelites had not completely driven the Canaanites from the land as the Lord had commanded them; as a result of their disobedience and hardened hearts, they begin to mirror their enemy by intermarrying with them and adopting their worship practices. **They do not follow or worship God exclusively** and instead spiral in their own depravity to the point where they become indistinguishable from the pagan nations. **The people who were intended to display God's character to the nations have all but forgotten him**.

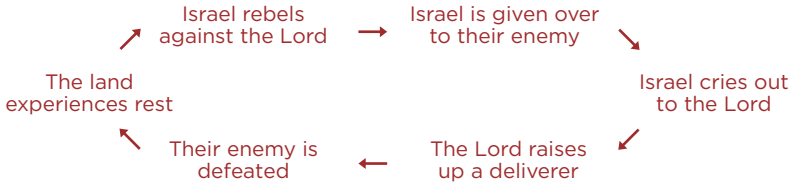
» *What must they believe about the pagan gods that they would choose to turn to them? Similarly, what does the enemy try to get us to believe today?*

» *Prayerfully consider who or what you are functionally serving and why. Ask the Lord to illuminate your false beliefs and lead your heart to repentance.*

» *What does God do to discipline his wayward children? In the midst of this discipline, how does the Lord respond to their cries for help?*

The book of Judges details a time of extreme darkness and depravity for the Israelites —a period of well over 300 years. During this time, the Lord, in his patience and faithfulness to his people, raises up a series of judges: **military and political leaders tasked with delivering God's people** from the enemies he uses to discipline the Israelites in their unfaithfulness. Although this book names 12 judges, a more detailed narrative is given for half of these leaders: Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson.

Throughout the period of the judges, **the Israelites live in a vicious cycle of sin**:



These judges, although appointed to deliver the Israelites, are often as morally corrupt as the people themselves. But even as the people continue to do evil, **the Lord remains unchangeably faithful**—never leaving them even as he disciplines them.

» *These divinely-appointed judges tend to spiral just like the nation. Why might God, in his foreknowledge, choose to use corrupt individuals to rescue his people?*

othniel

read: **Judges 3:1–15**

Othniel is the first judge God uses to deliver his people in response to their cry to the Lord for help. At this point, the people have been in captivity to the king of Mesopotamia for eight years as a result of their unfaithfulness and disobedience.

» *What do we learn about the people of Israel?*

» *What are the multiple ways God responds?*

» *How do we see the cycle of sin in this passage?*

The Israelites repeat this pattern of rebellion throughout the time of the judges. Yet God repeatedly demonstrates his extravagant patience and compassion toward his people.

» *Why might the people continually turn their backs on the Lord and return to sin?*

» *Where have you seen yourself stuck in a cycle of sin? And how has the Lord dealt patiently and compassionately with you?*

God in his holiness cannot ignore sin; however, in his great mercy, **he never ignores the cries of the repentant**. Yet, despite God's unrelenting commitment to his people, the last line of this book serves as a summation of this entire time period: "*In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes*" (**Judges 21:25**).

» *Is this corruption a result of having no earthly king or because they have no regard for their true King? How have you seen this pattern in your own life?*

So you delivered them into the hands of their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and **in your great compassion you gave them deliverers***, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies.*

Nehemiah 9:27 (NIV)

seeing Jesus

Much like he did with the Israelites, God still disciplines his children for their own good and sanctification (**Hebrews 12:5–10**). Try as we may, in our flesh, we cannot completely live free from sin and its devastating effects. Only in Christ do we find freedom from the power of sin's pull. Jesus is a perfect judge (**John 5:22–27**) and deliverer raised up from the people of God to defeat our enemy and save us from God's wrath (**Romans 5:8-9**). In Christ, need not fear that our enemy might be victorious because he no longer has any claim on our lives (**1 Corinthians 15:57**).

ruth

read: **Ruth 1–2**

Despite the rampant darkness and wickedness during the time of the judges, **God is still sovereignly in control**. In one particular instance, the truth that "*everyone did what was right in his own eyes*" (**Judges 21:25**) was actually a choice toward God and devotion to family. Contrary to the people of Israel largely running after pagan gods, Ruth, a pagan woman, abandons her gods to serve her mother-in-law Naomi among the people of the one true God.

The book of Ruth opens with news of a famine that is the result of the Israelites' disobedience under the judges. Elimelech and Naomi choose to flee to Moab—leaving the famine in Bethlehem to go to a pagan, but fruitful, land.

» *What might be at the heart of their decision to go to Moab, and what occurs while they are there?*

» *In the aftermath, what does Naomi say about the Lord, and what does this show us about her knowledge of him?*

Naomi has two daughters-in-law: Orpah and Ruth. While Orpah agrees with Naomi's instruction to return to Moab, Ruth insists on remaining with Naomi.

» *After Orpah leaves, what reasons may Ruth have had to stay with Naomi?*

» *What is significant about Ruth's response to Naomi?*

The downward spiral into depravity during the time of the judges inevitably included significant evil toward women, yet Ruth volunteers to go by herself to collect leftover grain among the workers in a field (**Deuteronomy 24:19**). Although this is a potentially risky move for Ruth, the Lord is with her. In his providence, she ends up in the field of Boaz, a family relative and the son of Rahab the Canaanite prostitute (**Joshua 2:1**).

» *How do you see God's kindness and provision for Ruth, and how does this encourage you in uncertain times?*

» *What do you notice about the character of Boaz, and how do these attributes reflect the character of God?*

ruth pursues boaz

read: **Ruth 3–4**

Naomi knows that there is no future for Ruth if she does not get remarried. Naomi also knows that there is no future for her own family without the birth of a son. So, perhaps both for her own benefit as well as the benefit of Ruth, Naomi encourages Ruth to pursue Boaz, a close relative.

» *What is Ruth communicating with her actions and words? What risks is she taking here and what kind of courage must have been required of her?*

» *How does Boaz demonstrate integrity in response to Ruth?*

Kinsman-Redeemer: *male next of kin who rescues or redeems property or people on behalf of his relative.*
Leviticus 25:25

According to the law of Moses, if a man dies without a son, his next closest male relative is to marry the widow for the purpose of producing a son to carry on the family name (**Deuteronomy 25:5–10**). Naomi has no grandson, therefore Ruth needs a kinsman-redeemer.

While Boaz is not the closest relative, he is the one who chooses to redeem Ruth. He will make sure that both she and Naomi are taken care of. Boaz fulfills his vow to Ruth, and they give birth to a son—Naomi's family line has been redeemed! Through the unimaginable grief of childless widows, **God brings himself glory by continuing his line** through a pagan woman who would become the great grandmother of David, and therefore in the lineage of Jesus, because of her God-ordained relationship with her kinsman-redeemer, Boaz.

» *Only God could orchestrate these events! How does God's creativity in this story bring you to worship and marvel at his expansive grace?*

seeing Jesus

The requirements of the kinsman-redeemer included having familial identity, a willingness to redeem, and the means to pay the price. Christ took on flesh becoming our elder brother (**Hebrews 2:17**) who willingly (**John 10:18**) paid the price with his own life to redeem us from sin and death (**1 Peter 1:18–19**).

Much like the first relative who relinquished his right and responsibility to redeem Ruth, Adam was to be our covenantal representative, our federal head, but he forfeited that position when he sinned in the garden (**Genesis 2:16–17**, **1 Corinthians 15:21–22**). Therefore, Christ became our true and perfect Kinsman-Redeemer—he redeemed us from the curse brought upon us by Adam's failure (**1 Corinthians 15:45–49**, **Romans 5:14–18**). And he will hold us secure until the end when we receive our promised eternal inheritance.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

Micah 5:2

the people demand a king

read: **1 Samuel 8**

The Israelites are led by judges for over three centuries, most with sin-soaked legacies. **Yet there is one last judge, Samuel**. He listens to the voice of the Lord and is the final judge before the nation transitions to a monarchy.

As Samuel nears the end of his life, he unwisely gives his role as judge to his sons. However, these sons do not honor God with their lives, and the elders of Israel decide it is time for a change of authority: they demand a king to rule over them instead of continuing with judges.

» *What are the reasons the people want a king?*

» *How does their demand reveal the condition of their heart toward God?*

» *What warnings does Samuel give the people regarding a king ruling over them?*

This is not the first time the Israelites have rejected the Lord God in favor of a more tangible option to follow (**Exodus 32:7–8**). After clearly describing how a human king will rule, God ultimately gives them exactly what they want: **a king just like everyone else**.

For the Lord is our judge;
the Lord is our lawgiver;
the Lord is our king*;*
he will save us.

Isaiah 33:22

» *Why would God grant their rebellious request? What lessons might he desire for them to learn?*

» *When has God answered your prayer with a "no" only to find out later that you really would not have wanted a "yes?"*

saul anointed

read: **1 Samuel 10**

The Lord uses a seemingly insignificant circumstance to cause Saul to cross paths with Samuel (**1 Samuel 9:15–27**). At the Lord's command, Samuel anoints Saul to be the first man to serve as king over Israel. Anointing ceremonies were rituals performed by prophets or priests in which oil was applied to a person or object to signify God's divine appointment for a sacred position; **this was a foreshadowing of the coming of the Holy Spirit who now permanently indwells all believers** (**Acts 2:1–4**).

» *Why might God be gracious to give Saul his Spirit, and subsequently a new heart, despite the people's sinful motives for desiring a king?*

» *How does Saul respond to his anointing, and what does this show us about his character?*

» *What are some of the challenges Saul might face as the first king of Israel?*

saul's first conquest

read: **1 Samuel 11**

The Israelites had historically been instructed to rely on the Lord to fight their battles (**Exodus 14:14**), **but now they have a human king who is responsible**, under God's leadership, to command the people in the conquering of their enemies. As king, the first nation against whom Saul defends God's people is the Ammonites whose king is Nahash.

» *The name Nahash means "serpent" in Hebrew. How does knowing this convey a deeper layer to what is being described in this chapter? (**Revelation 12:9**)*

» *Initially, the people are seemingly resigned to being slaves of their enemy; what other options are they failing to recognize?*

» *What would be the ramifications of the treaty Nahash proposes to the people?*

The people are desperate to avoid the pain of being conquered, however the cost of surrender to Nahash would prove to be considerably painful as well. Saul returns from the field, unaware of the hopeless desperation weighing on his people, and *"the Spirit of God rushed upon"* him (**1 Samuel 11:6**), emboldening him to call all his people to action in order to defend this city against the enemy.

Under the leadership of Saul, the Israelites defeat the Ammonites. This monumental first victory causes the people to recognize and celebrate Saul's position as king.

» *How does Saul demonstrate Spirit-empowered leadership in this passage?*

seeing Jesus

Jesus is the perfect and final judge who delivers his people (**John 5:22**). He alone is the preeminent King (**Revelation 19:16**) who reigns and rules as the Messiah—the Anointed One (**John 4:25–26**).

Empowered by the Spirit, Saul was gracious to spare those who had initially rejected him as king (**1 Samuel 11:12–13**); Jesus, at his crucifixion, cried out, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"* (**Luke 23:34**), and in his grace, Christ saves us even though we once rejected him (**Romans 5:10**). Although Saul defeats the serpent king of the Ammonites, it is merely a temporary victory. In his death and resurrection, Jesus has permanently defeated the serpent, *"the prince of the power of the air"* (**Ephesians 2:2**). This is our eternal victory from Satan's reign of terror: our union with Christ (**Colossians 1:13–15**).

ml

matthias' lot church

loving him
& loving his.