

# T H E S T O R Y

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## PERSONAL JOURNAL WEEKS 1-5

JEAN E. JONES



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## PERSONAL JOURNAL

JEAN E. JONES

**The Story: Personal Journal & Discussion Guide**

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# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## Personal Journal

### *About the Author*

**Jean E. Jones** is a freelance author who began teaching the Bible to her friends in high school and has been teaching it in various capacities ever since. She has written several study guides for women's and couples' studies at various churches, including a thirteen-week study on Philippians and series for C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* and *The Screwtape Letters*.

Jean E. is privileged to serve on the women's Heartline ministry team at Crossline Community Church in southern California. Her husband, Clay Jones, who is always her first reader and offers valuable insights, holds a D.Min. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and is an associate professor in the master of arts in Christian apologetics program at Biola University.

Jean E.'s most recent reflections can be found at [www.jeanejones.net](http://www.jeanejones.net).

### *About the Study*

*The Story: Personal Journal & Discussion Guide* is designed to accompany *The Story, NIV: The Bible as One Continuing Story of God and His People*. The questions will enhance your personal devotions by guiding you to more fully understand the text, by encouraging you to find ways to apply what you've learned to your everyday life, and by stimulating small group discussion.

Some of the questions are personal. These help you put yourself in the place of the people you're reading about and help small group members get to know each other. I encourage you to write out your answers, but you need not share your answers to personal questions unless you feel comfortable doing so. You'll discover that hearing others' stories enriches everyone and makes more evident the hand of God at work today.

How I wish I could hear your answers! Any time you wish, please feel free to hop over to my website's "**Let's Talk About 'The Story'**" page (<http://jeanejones.net/lesson-resources/>). Let me know your personal stories, what you're learning, and any questions you might have.

### *Introduction*

Discover the Bible's grand story in thirty-one weeks! *The Story: Personal Journal & Discussion Guide* takes us through the Bible's main themes and reveals God's plan throughout human history. We'll read through excerpts from Genesis to Revelation using *The Story, NIV: The Bible as One Continuing Story of God and His People*. Then we'll answer questions in this journal and discussion guide, which will help us understand the passages we read and apply them to our lives. Through the thirty-one chapters, God's plan will unfold starting with what was lost in the Garden of Eden and culminating in what is regained in eternity.

The chapters in this study guide have five divisions so that you can break them into daily devotionals of about twenty minutes if you wish. Chapters begin with a key question that illumines the main theme. They then delve into questions

## *Introduction*

designed to aid deeper reflection, spur spiritual growth, and promote meaningful discussions. The text explains historical background and key concepts. Timelines and charts illustrate how pieces fit together.

For those who want to dig deeper, footnotes provide additional explanations, related verses, and hyperlinks to related reading. The footnotes are entirely optional—I wrote them for small group leaders who want to prepare for questions that might come up and for the insatiably curious. They include links to scholarly articles by my wonderful husband, Dr. Clay Jones, who teaches Christian apologetics at Biola University. If you want still more, check out the “**Let’s Talk About ‘The Story’**” page on my website (<http://jeanejones.net/lesson-resources/>), where I’m regularly adding links.

Now, I’ve a short note for those of you who are reading the Old Testament for the first time. There will be some dark scenes: the Bible doesn’t hide human sin. The lives of some of the people we’ll read about were messy, just like ours. But just as light shines more brightly in darkness, so the glory of God’s redemption shines through the depth of human failing. We’ll find lessons in the darker parts too, and your understanding of God’s grace and mercy will deepen. I hope you’ll find that you can relate to many of these imperfect characters and take comfort in the fact that we all fall sometimes, but not farther than God’s grace can reach.

I pray that your love for God and his words will abound these thirty-one weeks as you step in with me to look closely at scenes here and there and then step back to see how each affects the big picture God is painting with the brushstrokes of history.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jeanne J." with a stylized flourish at the end.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

Chapter

## 1: Creation: The Beginning of Life as We Know It

**Key Question:** What was lost in the Garden of Eden, and why? Is there hope of getting it back?

### Creation

Monday - Pages 1–4

“In the beginning.” That’s where our story begins: the beginning—genesis—of creation.

1. (a) Who created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1)? (b) What rights do creators have over their creations?
2. For what purpose were humans created (Genesis 1:26)?
3. What was the status of all creation when God finished creating (Genesis 1:31)?

God made Adam<sup>1</sup> from the dust of the earth and placed him in the Garden of Eden. There God formed woman from man. Initially Adam called her *woman*; later he would name her Eve.

4. (a) What command did God give (Genesis 2:16–17)? (b) What would happen if Adam disobeyed? (c) Why do you think God gave Adam free will?
5. (a) What two things did Adam and Eve not have (Genesis 2:25)? (b) Why did they feel no shame?

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<sup>1</sup> Adam is Hebrew for *man*.





*Chapter 1: Creation: The Beginning of Life as We Know It*

She reached out her hand, took of the fruit, and gave some to her husband. Their eyes opened and those who had never known shame felt its deathly pall and knew Eve had chosen wrongly. They knew too that they were naked, for the ashamed dread nakedness.

9. (a) Adam and Eve tried to cover up their shame with fig leaves.<sup>3</sup> What are ways we try to cover up shame? (b) When they heard God coming, they hid behind trees.<sup>4</sup> What are ways people hide from God when they feel ashamed? (c) When God asked Adam where he was, what did Adam reply (Genesis 3:10)?

God had seen Adam naked before. Adam's great fear was that God would find out about the fruit, not his nakedness. God asked Adam if he had eaten the forbidden fruit. God knew the answer, but gave Adam a chance to confess.

10. (a) What two beings did Adam blame for his transgression (Genesis 3:12)? (b) Whom did Eve blame (Genesis 3:13)? (c) Does blaming others remove guilt? Why or why not? (d) Eve's response was an appeal to pity: "I'm a victim, so it's not really my fault." What are other ways people appeal to pity to escape responsibility for wrongdoing?

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3:7.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:8.

## The Judgment

Wednesday - Pages 5–7

God judged the three beings, but in the judgment gave hope to the man and woman.

11. (a) What would the serpent do to a descendant of Eve's (Genesis 3:15)? (b) What would Eve's descendant do to the serpent (3:15)?

God cursed the serpent, but not the man and woman.<sup>5</sup> Instead, God promised a Serpent Crusher would one day come. The serpent would bruise his heel, but Eve's offspring—her "seed"<sup>6</sup>—would deal him a mortal blow.

Within Eve's judgment of painful childbirth lived the hope of bearing children. Within Adam's judgment of painful toil remained the hope of producing life-sustaining food. Though they would die, the human race would continue.

God cursed the ground too: it would bear thorns and thistles and was bound to decay.<sup>7</sup> The earth would pass away.<sup>8</sup>

12. Are there any natural evils—mold, cancer, tsunamis, etc.—that could not have resulted from God cursing the ground?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Not all divine penalties are curses. Adam and Eve did not lose God's entire blessing, and their penalty contained hope of future blessing.

<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew word translated *offspring* means "seed." In the Bible, offspring are often called seeds.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 3:17–19; Romans 8:21.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 21:33; 1 John 2:17.

<sup>9</sup> See also Isaiah 24:4–6.

*Chapter 1: Creation: The Beginning of Life as We Know It*

Hearing God's judgment combined with hope, Adam with faith now "named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all living."<sup>10</sup> In compassion, God clothed Adam and Eve, covering their shame and protecting them from the elements.

13. (a) What would humans now know (Genesis 3:22)? (b) Why did God banish them from the Garden of Eden (3:22–24)? (c) Why wouldn't God want creatures that had chosen to rebel to be able to live forever? (d) What hope did God give in letting us know a tree of life exists?

By taking of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam plunged humankind into knowing evil, but also into knowing good.

14. (a) Give an example from history in which great good became known in the face of great evil. (b) Without naming names, give an example in which an experience with a person who lacked a virtue caused you to better understand the virtue and appreciate it in others. (c) How does knowing evil enhance our knowledge and appreciation of good?

In the face of evil, such goods as self-sacrifice, courage, grace, and mercy are made evident. None of these are humanly possible without the risk of personal loss or harm. The greater the loss or harm, the more heroic is the virtue that counters it.

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<sup>10</sup> Genesis 3:20. *Eve* sounds like the Hebrew word for *living*.

## Eve's Offspring

Thursday - Pages 7–9

Eve bore children, and the earth bore food. Her first children, Cain and Abel, brought offerings to the Lord. The Lord accepted Abel's offering, but not Cain's.<sup>11</sup>

15. (a) How did Cain respond to God's disapproval (Genesis 4:5)? (b) How do God's three questions indicate Cain knew what was right to do and therefore had no valid reason for anger (4:6–7)? (c) What did God warn Cain he must do (4:7)? (d) List some temptations that accompany jealousy. (e) What are things we can do to help us master sin?

Cain didn't heed the Lord's warning. Instead, he gave in to sin and killed his brother. God cursed Cain and drove him from his presence,<sup>12</sup> and Adam and Eve knew evil.

Time passed. Adam and Eve bore more children and eventually died. In those days, people lived nearly 1,000 years. As people increased, so did violence.

16. (a) What did the Lord see when he looked into people's hearts (Genesis 6:5)? (b) With what did this heart condition fill the earth (6:11)? (c) Was creation's status still "very good"? Why or why not? (d) Think of a violent, corrupt ruler from history. What would be different if that person could live 1,000 years? (e) What do you think it was like to live during that time?

Among all the evil people of the time, a righteous man stood out: Noah. God told Noah to build an ark to save himself, his family, and animals from coming floodwaters. The Lord said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years."<sup>13</sup> Though this passage may mean that God gave Noah 120 years to build the ark, there's another meaning: after the flood, God shortened people's lives, thus limiting the evil any one person could commit, as well as limiting the evil any one person had to endure.

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<sup>11</sup> We're not told what was wrong with Cain's offering. That Abel brought "some of the firstborn" while Cain brought "some of the fruits"—not some of the firstfruits—suggests Cain may have brought leftovers. The heart attitude counts most in offerings. Hebrews 11:4 tells us Abel gave his offering in faith, unlike Cain. (See Exodus 23:19a on the later firstfruits offerings.)

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 4:11–16.

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 6:3.

## The Flood

Friday - Pages 9–12

Rain fell for forty days. Only those in the ark survived. They stayed in the ark until the waters receded, just over a year.<sup>14</sup> The Lord brought Noah's family out of the ark and warned them not to return to violence, for he would demand an accounting for bloodshed.<sup>15</sup>

17. (a) What covenant did God make with earth's creatures (Genesis 9:12–16)? (b) What was the sign of the covenant? (c) How was the flood meant for humankind's ultimate good? (d) How did the rainbow reflect God's good intentions for humankind?

God blessed Noah's family and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth."<sup>16</sup> The blessing was similar to that which God gave to their first parents, Adam and Eve, but it left out something: ruling the earth. For when Adam and Eve obeyed Satan rather than God, they lost their reign to him.<sup>17</sup>

And yet there remained elements of hope. The rainbow gave hope of life and told of God's love and his desire for people to live kindly together. That God did not destroy the tree of life, but merely barred the way to it, gave hope that one day the way to it might be opened. The promise of a Serpent Crusher gave hope that the serpent's rule would end. That Adam and Eve through pain could bear and sustain life gave hope that the Serpent Crusher's bruised heel might be life-giving too.

The story has just begun. Next week we meet the family through which the seed of the Serpent Crusher will be traced.

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<sup>14</sup> Compare Genesis 7:11 with 8:13.

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 9:5–6.

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 9:1.

<sup>17</sup> Jesus calls Satan the prince of this world (John 14:30). See also Ephesians 2:22.

## Bible Outline

### Old Testament

#### Five Books of Moses

Genesis  
Exodus  
Leviticus  
Numbers  
Deuteronomy

#### Histories

Joshua  
Judges  
Ruth  
1 Samuel  
2 Samuel  
1 Kings  
2 Kings  
1 Chronicles  
2 Chronicles  
Ezra  
Nehemiah  
Esther

#### Books of Wisdom

Job  
Psalms  
Proverbs  
Ecclesiastes  
Song of Songs

#### Prophetic

##### Major Prophets

Isaiah  
Jeremiah  
Lamentations  
Ezekiel  
Daniel

##### Twelve Minor Prophets

Hosea  
Joel  
Amos  
Obadiah  
Jonah  
Micah  
Nahum  
Habakkuk  
Zephaniah  
Haggai  
Zechariah  
Malachi

### New Testament

#### Four Gospels

Matthew  
Mark  
Luke  
John

#### History

Acts

#### Letters

##### Letters of Paul

Romans  
1 Corinthians  
2 Corinthians  
Galatians  
Ephesians  
Philippians  
Colossians  
1 Thessalonians  
2 Thessalonians  
1 Timothy  
2 Timothy  
Titus  
Philemon

##### General Letters

Hebrews  
James  
1 Peter  
2 Peter  
1 John  
2 John  
3 John  
Jude

#### Prophetic

Revelation

# THE STORY

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## *Chapter 2: God Builds a Nation*

**Key Question:** What can we learn about faith from Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob?

### **The Call**

*Monday - Pages 13–16*

Noah's descendents spread out over the earth. As time passed, people again rejected God's way for their own way. God chose a man for a special purpose: building a nation to represent him.

The prophet Abram was seventy-five years old when God told him to leave his home and go to Canaan. His wife Sarai was sixty-five, still beautiful, but barren.

1. (a) What did God tell Abram he would do for him (Genesis 12:2–3)? (b) What would happen through Abram to all peoples on earth (12:3)? (c) What part of this promise was particularly surprising considering Abram was childless? (d) How did Abram show his faith in God (12:4)? (e) How does our obedience to God's commands show our faith in him?

After Abram arrived in Canaan, God showed him the land he would give Abram's offspring, who would be more numerous than the dust of the earth.<sup>18</sup>

The Lord blessed Abram by keeping him safe in this dangerous land, just as he promised. In fact, God enabled him to rescue his nephew Lot from the armies of four strong kings with only 318 men.<sup>19</sup> Yet one thing puzzled Abram.

2. (a) What had God still not given Abram (Genesis 15:2–3)? (b) What did God promise Abram (15:4–5)? (c) What was Abram's response (15:6)? (d) What was the Lord's response (15:6)?

That night, God gave Abram a miraculous sign. When people made covenants in those days, they sacrificed animals, cut the carcasses in two, and laid the pieces across from each other. The parties spoke the terms of the covenant and walked between the pieces. God told Abraham to sacrifice and lay out animals. He told Abram to know for certain that his descendants would possess this land in four hundred years. Then a smoking firepot and blazing torch appeared and passed between the animal pieces: all would come to pass.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Genesis 13:14–17.

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 14.

<sup>20</sup> Genesis 15:7–21.



## The Proof

Tuesday - Pages 16–18

A decade passed and Sarai, thinking she had no chance of bearing a child for Abram, offered her servant Hagar to mother a child for her.<sup>21</sup> When Hagar became pregnant, though, she acted haughtily towards Sarai. They argued and Hagar fled. The angel of the Lord came to Hagar.

3. (a) What did the angel of the Lord tell Hagar to do (Genesis 16:9)? (b) Why does it take humility to mend a relationship by doing what was right, even though the other person did wrong too? (c) Why did the angel of the Lord say to name her child Ishmael, which means “God hears” (16:11)? (d) What name did she give to the Lord (16:13)? (e) What do you learn from these two names for God that you can apply to a current situation?

A long thirteen years later, the Lord again appeared to Abram.

4. (a) How did the Lord identify himself to Abraham (Genesis 17:1)? (b) What do you learn from this name that you can apply to a current situation? (c) What did God tell Abram to do (17:1)? (d) What was God about to do (17:2)?

God told Abram to call himself Abraham.<sup>22</sup> He made a covenant with Abraham in which God would make Abraham the father of many nations and kings. Abraham’s part of the covenant was to circumcise himself and all the males of his household. Every baby boy descended from him was to be circumcised at eight days old.

God also told Abraham to call his wife Sarah instead of Sarai,<sup>23</sup> and said he would bless the approximately eighty-nine-year-old Sarah so that she could bear a son within a year. They were to name him Isaac, and he would be the child through whom God would establish his covenant.<sup>24</sup>

Though such a pregnancy was humanly impossible, Abraham trusted God and circumcised all the males in his household.

And so, twenty-five years after God told Abraham to go to Canaan, when Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah ninety, God miraculously blessed Sarah and she bore the child of promise: Isaac.

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<sup>21</sup> This was a common practice. Hagar became a wife of lower status than Sarai.

<sup>22</sup> *Abram* means *exalted father* and *Abraham* means *father of many*.

<sup>23</sup> Both names mean *princess*.

<sup>24</sup> Genesis 17:15–19.

## The Test

Wednesday - Pages 18–21

Abraham watched Isaac grow up. He'd seen God's miraculous hand in his life many times. He was a prophet who had talked with God and with angels. He'd received astonishing blessings. God had promised Abraham that Isaac would be his heir and the child of the covenant. But then God tested Abraham's faith in this promise by asking him to do something that appeared to make the promise's fulfillment impossible.<sup>25</sup>

5. (a) What did God ask Abraham to do with his beloved son, the only son of God's promise (Genesis 22:2)? (b) "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead,"<sup>26</sup> and so his faith stood firm. How did Abraham demonstrate his faith that obeying God wouldn't stop Isaac from being the child of promise (22:5)?

The angel of the Lord stopped Abraham before Isaac was harmed.

6. (a) What did Abraham's willingness to obey God prove (Genesis 22:11–12)? (b) When God provided a ram to substitute as a sacrifice, what did Abraham call the place (22:13–14)?

7. (a) What would happen through Abraham's offspring—his "seed" (Genesis 22:18)? (b) What "seed" did we read about last week that was promised to Eve<sup>27</sup>?

God sometimes asked prophets to perform actions that foreshadowed and explained important future events. Abraham and Isaac were both prophets, and their actions told their descendants that God can provide a substitute for someone destined for death. They didn't know it yet, but their actions also foreshadowed how the seed promised to Eve and now to them would one day crush the serpent and bless all peoples.

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<sup>25</sup> For a fuller examination of this test, see *Abraham, Isaac & Child Sacrifice* at [www.jeanejones.net/2011/10/abraham-isaac-child-sacrifice](http://www.jeanejones.net/2011/10/abraham-isaac-child-sacrifice).

<sup>26</sup> Hebrews 11:19.

<sup>27</sup> Genesis 3:15

## Jacob

Thursday - Pages 21–24

Isaac married Rebekah when he was forty. She, like Sarah, was barren. Isaac prayed for her, and finally, twenty years later, she became pregnant. God told her she carried twins, both of whom would become nations, but the older would serve the younger. She gave birth to Esau and Jacob. They grew into manhood, with Isaac favoring Esau and Rebekah favoring Jacob.

Esau was born first and normally would have received both a double inheritance and the covenant promise of fathering the nation that would belong to God. But he came home hungry one day and found Jacob cooking red lentil stew. In exchange for a bowl, he swore an oath giving Jacob his birthrights, thus despising God's covenant and showing himself to be godless.<sup>28</sup>

When Isaac was old and blind, he asked Esau to hunt game and fix him a meal, after which he would bless Esau.<sup>29</sup> Rebekah overheard, and she and Jacob tricked Isaac into blessing Jacob. Isaac blessed him with the riches of the land, with ruling over his relatives, and with blessings for those who bless him and curses for those who curse him—all aspects of God's promises to Abraham and an unwitting affirmation of God's promise to Rebekah.

When Esau discovered Jacob had received the blessing Isaac intended for him, he was furious and said he would kill Jacob after Isaac died. Wanting to keep Jacob safe, Rebekah convinced Isaac to send Jacob to her brother to marry one of her nieces.

As Jacob journeyed, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and told him the covenant promise would be through him, and God would watch over him and bring him back safely.<sup>30</sup> Jacob named the place where God spoke to him Bethel.<sup>31</sup>

Jacob fell in love with his cousin Rachel and arranged to marry her in return for seven years' work. But after the seven years, his uncle deceived Jacob into marrying Rachel's sister Leah. When Jacob discovered he'd married the wrong girl, he angrily confronted his uncle. The girl's father agreed to let him marry Rachel a week later in return for Jacob's promise of another seven years' labor.

Through the years, the sisters' dad repeatedly tricked and cheated Jacob, but God intervened and made Jacob wealthy at the expense of his deceitful uncle. Twenty years later God told Jacob to return home.<sup>32</sup> Jacob feared facing Esau, but obeyed.

The night before reaching his brother, a man wrestled with Jacob until daybreak.

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<sup>28</sup> Genesis 25:34; Hebrews 12:16.

<sup>29</sup> Oral deathbed blessings were legally binding.

<sup>30</sup> Genesis 28:13–15.

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 28:19.

<sup>32</sup> Rebekah had promised to send for Jacob as soon as Esau's anger subsided (Genesis 27:45), probably anticipating a short separation. She never called for him and may not have lived to see his return or the reuniting of the brothers. By manipulating her husband and children to get what she wanted for her son, she lost her treasured relationship with her son. She hurt Isaac and Esau, and she indirectly caused Jacob to suffer as he unlearned the deceitfulness she taught him. She didn't trust God to fulfill his promise to her without her intervention.

8. (a) How did the man show Jacob he could disable him at any time (Genesis 32: 25)? (b) Jacob apparently realized the man was no ordinary human. For what did he ask (32:26)? (c) The man gave Jacob a new name: Israel.<sup>33</sup> With whom had Jacob been wrestling (32:28–30)?<sup>34</sup> (d) Who was the true source of all his blessings (32:29)?

Jacob had used trickery to get the blessing his father wanted to give Esau, and suffered the consequence of estranged relationships. Jacob learned what it was like to be at the receiving end of deceit and trickery when he suffered under his uncle's treachery. But though God disciplined Jacob, he also blessed him and showed him repeatedly that it was he who was the true source of blessings.

9. (a) Briefly describe how deception hurt a relationship in your life, without naming names. (b) God commands us not to lie or use deceit.<sup>35</sup> How does using deception to obtain what we want rather than obeying God show lack of faith in God?

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<sup>33</sup> *Israel* means "God struggles" or "he struggles with God."

<sup>34</sup> God appeared in the form of an angel so that Jacob could wrestle with him (see Hosea 12:3–4). Some Christians think such appearances are of the preincarnate Christ.

<sup>35</sup> "Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another" (Leviticus 19:11). See also Romans 1:29; 2 Corinthians 4:2; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Peter 2:1.

## Israel

Friday - Pages 24–27

Instead of trying to kill him, when Esau met Jacob, Esau embraced and kissed him. God had changed Esau's heart and kept Jacob safe, as he promised.

10. (a) Describe a time God mended a relationship in your life by changing someone's heart (yours or another person's). (b) Write a praise to God for this restoration.

God sent Jacob back to Bethel, where he had appeared to him previously. There he told him again that his new name was to be Israel, and that he would give his descendants the land promised to Abraham and Isaac.

11. Many years later, a New Testament author wrote about the faith of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob. What stands out to you the most from Hebrews 11:6–20? Why?

12. Which one of the following attributes of God that we've read about this week do you most need to remember today? Why?

- |                                     |              |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Your very great reward              | Your shield  |
| Credits your faith as righteousness | Sees you     |
| Has power to fulfill promises       | Is faithful  |
| Hears your cries                    | Will provide |
| Is God almighty                     |              |

From the twelve sons of Israel would come a nation of twelve tribes. But there would be hard times first. When the Lord made his covenant with Abraham, he told him this:

Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites<sup>36</sup> has not yet reached its full measure. *Genesis 15:13–16*

The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob needed to remember the miracles the Lord had done in the patriarchs' lives if their faith wasn't to waiver.

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<sup>36</sup> The Amorites were Canaanites. God would remove the Canaanites because of their great wickedness. Though God judged two Canaanite cities in Abraham's time (Sodom and Gomorrah—see Genesis 18–19), the people in the rest of the land would not reach the level of sin that would justify removal for four hundred years.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## Chapter 3:

### *Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh*

**Key Question:** What can we learn from Joseph about trusting God through hardship and betrayal?

### **From Favorite to Enslavement**

*Monday - Pages 29–31*

Everyone knew Joseph was his dad's favorite. His mother, Rachel, was the only wife his dad had truly loved.<sup>37</sup> She was barren, though, and his dad prayed many years for her to have a child. Finally when his dad, Jacob, was 91,<sup>38</sup> Rachel gave birth to Joseph, bringing joy to them both.

Joseph was Jacob's eleventh son. Eventually Rachel became pregnant again, but grief struck when she died giving birth to little Benjamin.

Although the family was blessed in many ways, they suffered tragedies too, some from living in a harsh land and some from Joseph's brothers' bad choices,<sup>39</sup> including his oldest brother, Reuben, sleeping with his dad's concubine.<sup>40</sup>

When Joseph was seventeen, Jacob gave him a beautiful coat, inflaming his brothers' jealousy.

1. (a) What are some of the reasons Joseph's brothers hated him (Genesis 37:2–11)? (b) What are some areas in which Joseph's character perhaps needed to grow? (c) What are ways that parents can combat rivalry among their children?

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<sup>37</sup> Jacob fell in love with his cousin Rachel. His uncle agreed to give him Rachel as wife if Jacob worked for him seven years. Jacob did so, but on his wedding night, his uncle sent Leah into his dark tent. Leah slept with him, letting him think she was Rachel. When Jacob discovered the deception the next morning, he was furious and demanded Rachel as promised. His uncle let him marry Rachel a week later in return for another seven years' labor. Leah envied Jacob's love for Rachel. She bore four sons right away and hoped this would cause Jacob to love her like he loved Rachel. Rachel desperately wanted children and out of jealousy over Leah's sons, gave Jacob her maidservant to bear children for her. The maidservant bore two sons. Leah stopped bearing children for awhile and, competing with Rachel, gave her maidservant to Jacob too. That maidservant also bore two boys. Leah bargained with Rachel to let her sleep with Jacob, and she bore two more sons and a daughter—seven children in all. Finally, Rachel became pregnant and bore Joseph.

<sup>38</sup> Jacob came to Egypt when he was 130 (Genesis 47:9) and Joseph was 39 (41:46–47; 45:6), making him 91 at Joseph's birth.

<sup>39</sup> A Canaanite raped Joseph's sister, and two of his furious brothers (Simeon and Levi) in revenge killed all the city's men and plundered the city's goods, women, and children (Genesis 34). Jacob later said their violence towards men and beasts was cruel and cursed (Genesis 49:5–7).

<sup>40</sup> Genesis 35:22. Firstborn sons inherited their father's concubines, and Reuben was probably trying to claim prematurely what he thought would be his right one day.

### *Chapter 3: Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh*

Not long after Joseph had brought a bad report to his father about how his brothers tended their flocks, Jacob again sent Joseph to check on his brothers. The brothers saw him coming and plotted to kill him.

2. (a) How did the oldest brother, Reuben, attempt to rescue Joseph (Genesis 37:21–22)? (b) What plan did Judah—fourth oldest—devise (37:26–27)? (c) The other brothers followed Judah’s leadership. How might Reuben’s incest have eroded his moral authority and lessened his effectiveness as a leader among his brothers?

They sold Joseph to Ishmaelite merchants, who took him to Egypt. To cover their crime, the brothers dipped Joseph’s robe in goat’s blood and gave it to their father so he would think Joseph dead. Jacob was devastated.

## **Can It get Any Worse?**

*Tuesday - Pages 31–33*

In Egypt, Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh’s guard, bought Joseph as a slave.

3. (a) What are some of the feelings Joseph may have had when he found himself a slave in Egypt? (b) Had he ended up in this situation because God had abandoned him (Genesis 39:2)? (c) In what ways did God bless Joseph (39:2–4)? (d) Briefly describe a hardship you endured and how God cared for you through it.

Potiphar’s wife thought Joseph handsome and wanted to sleep with him.

4. (a) What did Joseph consider about his master that helped him resist sexual temptation (Genesis 39:8–9a)? (b) What did Joseph consider about God that helped him resist (39:9b)? (c) What actions did Joseph take to resist (39:10)? (d) When he found himself alone with her and entrapped, what did he do (39:11–12)? (e) What can we learn from Joseph about resisting sexual temptation?

The rebuffed temptress accused the young Hebrew of trying to sleep with her, and Potiphar threw Joseph in prison.



*Chapter 3: Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh*

5. (a) Was Joseph in prison because God had abandoned him (Genesis 39:21)? (b) What evidence of God's presence did Joseph find (Genesis 39:21–23)? (c) Does faithfulness to God mean we'll never suffer wrongly from the schemes of the wicked on this earth?

The wicked must be permitted to succeed in some evil schemes to expose what's in their hearts and to justify judgment. Yet the New Testament tells us there is a time appointed when the Lord "will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God" (1 Corinthians 4:5).<sup>41</sup>

6. (a) What warning should we heed about motives being exposed? (b) What comfort can we derive from this verse when others believe false accusations about us?

Joseph again served faithfully in the difficult, undeserved circumstances in which he found himself. One night two fellow prisoners had prophetic dreams, and God showed Joseph their interpretations. He told one of the prisoners he would be freed in three days and asked for help clearing his name. The man was freed, but forgot Joseph.

Two years later, Pharaoh had a disturbing dream, and the exonerated prisoner told him about Joseph.

7. (a) How did Joseph know what certain dreams meant (Genesis 41:16)? (b) Joseph told Pharaoh the dreams were God revealing to Pharaoh that seven years of abundance would be followed by seven years of famine. He advised Pharaoh on how to prepare for the famine. How did God exalt Joseph (41:39–40)?

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<sup>41</sup> In this passage, Paul was responding to false accusations regarding his motives. He says his conscience is clear, but he knows that doesn't mean he's innocent. He tells his accusers not to judge his motives, which are for now hidden in darkness but will be exposed and open to judgment at the appointed time.

## Dreams Proved Prophetic

Wednesday - Pages 34–37

Joseph was thirty years old when he entered Pharaoh's service.<sup>42</sup> He collected grain during the abundant years. When the predicted drought arrived and famine began to spread, he sold the grain to those in need. Joseph's ten older brothers were among those who came to buy grain. When they bowed before him, Joseph recognized them and realized the dreams he had told his brothers about when he was seventeen had now come to pass.

8. (a) How did the dreams let Joseph know he had been in God's hands through all the hard times? (b) Joseph said he wanted to find out if they were "honest men." The brothers assumed he meant only whether they were honest about not being spies. About what else might Joseph have wanted to know whether they were being honest (Genesis 42:19–20)? (c) Is it wise to test someone who has intentionally sinned against you before trusting him or her? Why or why not?
  
9. (a) Joseph overheard his brothers talking about how they had treated him two decades before. What were they feeling (42:21–23)? (b) What do you think it was like for them to carry their secret for over twenty years, knowing they'd greatly grieved both their brother and their father? (c) What did overhearing this conversation tell Joseph about his brothers? (d) Joseph kept Simeon<sup>43</sup> in prison until the others returned with Benjamin. Do you think Simeon felt this imprisonment was just? Why or why not (42:21, 24)?

Jacob wouldn't let them take Benjamin to Egypt until they ran out of food and he had no choice. Judah told his father he would be personally responsible for Benjamin's safe return, and the brothers returned to Egypt with Benjamin.

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<sup>42</sup> Genesis 41:46.

<sup>43</sup> Simeon was the second oldest. Perhaps Joseph chose him because he now knew that Reuben, the oldest, had tried to rescue Joseph from the others.

## Secrets Revealed

Thursday - Pages 37–40

Joseph had tests for the men who had once gone to extraordinary, dishonest means to get rid of a brother of whom they were jealous. He offered them an easy and legitimate way to dispose of another. First he served a meal and gave Benjamin five times the food as the rest. Then he had his steward place his silver cup in Benjamin's sack of grain. The next morning, the steward found the cup in Benjamin's sack.

10. (a) If the older brothers were still driven by jealousy, how would they have reacted to Benjamin's receiving more food than they (Genesis 43:34)? (b) When the steward found the cup in Benjamin's sack, what did Judah say had been uncovered, and what do you think he meant by it (44:16)?

Joseph said he would keep Benjamin as a slave while the rest returned to their father in peace.

11. (a) In what ways had Judah's heart changed since he devised the plan to sell Joseph (Genesis 44:33–34)? (b) What did Joseph now know about his brothers' intentions towards Benjamin?

Joseph sent away his attendants and wept loudly, the pain of all he'd suffered pouring from his heart and the knowledge that his brothers mourned their ill-treatment of him spreading salve over his wounds.<sup>44</sup> Speaking in Hebrew to them for the first time, he told them who he was.

12. (a) How did Joseph try to comfort his terrified brothers (Genesis 45:5)? (b) Why had God allowed the brothers to carry out their cruel act (45:5–8)? (c) If possible, describe a good that came out of a wrong done to you, without naming wrongdoers.

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<sup>44</sup> For more on how Joseph triumphed over betrayal and forgave his brothers, see [www.jeanejones.net/2012/06/joseph-triumph-over-betrayal](http://www.jeanejones.net/2012/06/joseph-triumph-over-betrayal).

## God's Plan

Friday Pages 40–42

Joseph told his brothers to bring his father to Egypt. That meant confessing to their father the secret sin that had weighed on them so long.

13. If you've confessed a burdensome secret to someone mature who loved and accepted you, briefly describe your feelings before and after.

The family lived together in Egypt. Seventeen years later, Jacob knew he was close to death and adopted Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, so they would inherit as one of his other children.<sup>45</sup> In this way he gave Joseph the double-inheritance of a firstborn son.<sup>46</sup> Then he blessed his twelve sons and prophesied over them. There was a special promise to Judah, who had been willing to lay down his life for his youngest brother for the sake of his love for his father:

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. *Genesis 49:10*

After Jacob died, the ten oldest brothers feared Joseph's wrath. They sent Joseph a message saying their father wanted him to forgive them, and they asked his forgiveness.

14. (a) How was the brothers' offering themselves as slaves appropriate (Genesis 50:18)? (b) How did Joseph demonstrate forgiveness (50:19–21)? (c) How can you demonstrate forgiveness to someone who wants your forgiveness?

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<sup>45</sup> Jacob also said that when their descendants returned to the Promised Land and the territories were named for the sons, Manasseh and Ephraim would have territories named for them (Genesis 48:5–6).

<sup>46</sup> The oldest son, Reuben, sacrificed his right to it when he slept with his father's concubine (Genesis 49:3–4).

*Chapter 3: Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh*

Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

15. (a) How did God work all things in Joseph’s life for good? (b) Why is faith in God’s ability to work good out of bad circumstances necessary to forgive those who have wronged us in ways that seem irreparable?<sup>47</sup> (c) Describe the good God worked from a hardship that you couldn’t imagine good coming from while you were in the midst of it. (d) What lessons do you need to remember to trust God through the current or next hardship you encounter?

Prophets’ lives sometimes foretold momentous future events. Next week we’ll see how just as Joseph went from favorite to enslavement to exaltation, so did the growing nation of Israel.

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<sup>47</sup> Sometimes we don’t know the good God brings until heaven.

# THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## Chapter 4:

### *Deliverance*

**Key Question:** How can we nurture faith rather than doubts?

### **The Call**

*Monday - Pages 43–47*

God warned Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved and mistreated in a foreign land for four hundred years, after which he would bring them to the Promised Land.<sup>48</sup> As we pick up the story, four hundred years have passed since Joseph's family came to Egypt, and the people were indeed suffering under Pharaoh.

1. (a) In what ways did Pharaoh oppress the Israelites (Exodus 1:11–16, 22)? (b) Do you think the Israelites would have been willing to follow Moses out of Egypt if their lives were prosperous and comfortable? Why or why not? (c) If possible, briefly describe a time God used difficulties to guide you to make a change.

When Moses was born, Pharaoh's daughter rescued him from the Nile and raised him as her son. When he grew up, he killed an Egyptian who mistreated a Hebrew<sup>49</sup> and fled from Pharaoh to Midian. That Pharaoh eventually died, but the new Pharaoh continued mistreating the Hebrews, and the people cried out to God in their misery.

One day on Mount Horeb,<sup>50</sup> Moses saw a bush that appeared to be on fire without being consumed by the flames. As he approached to see this wonder, the Lord God called to him from the bush.

2. (a) How did God first identify himself to Moses (Exodus 3:6)? (b) What had God seen and heard, and what was his reaction (3:7, 9)? (c) What did God plan to do about what he had seen (3:8)? (d) What do you learn about God from this passage?

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<sup>48</sup> Genesis 15:13–15.

<sup>49</sup> At this time, the Israelites (descendants of Israel) were often called *Hebrews* (descendants of Eber, Genesis 11:14). After the Assyrian exile they were also called Jews (from Judah).

<sup>50</sup> Mount Horeb is probably another name for Mount Sinai.

*Chapter 4: Deliverance*

Moses asked God his name.<sup>51</sup>

3. (a) What name did God give himself (Exodus 3:14)? (b) What does this name tell you about God? (c) Whom did God tell Moses to say sent him (3:15)?

The Hebrew word translated Lord in capital letters is “Yhvh,”<sup>52</sup> which means the “Self-Existent or Eternal,”<sup>53</sup> and is the third-person form of the Hebrew for “I AM.”

God told Moses he was sending him to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt into the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses asked what to do if the Israelites didn’t believe God had sent him—a valid concern—and God enabled him to give miraculous signs.

4. (a) What was Moses’ reaction (Exodus 4:10)? (b) What was God’s response (11–12)? (c) What do you learn from this about how God equips us to do that which he calls us to do? (d) Is there anything you think God may be calling you to do that you don’t feel equipped for yet? If so, what encouragement can you take to step out in faith as Moses did?

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<sup>51</sup> The Hebrews lived among Egyptians who worshipped many gods.

<sup>52</sup> Or “Yhwh”; sometimes transliterated “Jehovah.”

<sup>53</sup> *Strong’s Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary* (Austin: WORDsearch, 2008).

## The First Signs

Tuesday - Pages 47–50

Initially God allowed Moses' brother Aaron to accompany him and speak for him. Moses and Aaron met with the Israelite elders, told them all God had said, and showed them signs as proof. The elders believed and worshipped God in gratitude for his concern over their misery.

But when Moses told Pharaoh that God said, "Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert," Pharaoh refused. He accused the Hebrews of laziness and told them he'd no longer supply the straw they needed to make bricks: they'd have to search for their own straw to make the same number of bricks. The slave drivers beat the Israelites for not meeting their impossible quota, and the Israelites blamed Moses.<sup>54</sup> Dismayed, Moses asked God why things got worse instead of better when he did what God told him to do.

5. (a) What did God tell Moses to tell the Israelites (Exodus 6:6)? (b) What do we learn about God from the fact that he planned to judge Egypt for mistreating the Israelites? (c) What relationship did God want to have with them (6:7a)? (d) Once they saw God redeem them mightily, what would they know (6:7b)?

God promised to redeem them with mighty acts of judgment so they would have no doubt that he was God.

6. (a) Where was God going to take them (Exodus 6:8)? (b) What comfort might they have taken in being reminded of God's promise to their forefathers? (c) Briefly describe the last time you were reminded of one of God's promises. How did that encourage you?

But the discouraged Israelites wouldn't listen to Moses. God told Moses to approach Pharaoh again. Moses replied, "If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me?" Despite his misgivings, he obeyed God and went.

As a sign to Pharaoh that God sent Moses, Aaron threw down his staff and it became a snake. Pharaoh's magicians did likewise, but Aaron's staff swallowed the other staffs, showing God's power was greater.

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<sup>54</sup> Exodus 5:21.



*Chapter 4: Deliverance*

7. (a) What was Pharaoh's reaction to Moses' repeated call to let the people go (Exodus 7:13)? (b) Had God called Moses to convince Pharaoh, or to simply say what God told him to say? (c) When you share a truth about God, are you ever discouraged when people don't respond positively? Why or why not? (d) Moses obeyed even though he felt inadequate; briefly describe a time you obeyed God in something you didn't feel capable of doing and saw him come through in an amazing way.

God's judgment on Egypt now began. Nine times Moses went before Pharaoh and announced a plague unless Pharaoh let God's people go: the Nile turned to blood, frogs encroached, gnats clung, flies swarmed, livestock died, boils infected, hail destroyed, locusts devoured, and darkness overcame.<sup>55</sup> Nine times Pharaoh refused.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The Egyptians believed in many gods, each of which had power over aspects of nature. These plagues showed the God who sent Moses—the God of Abraham—had the true power over all of nature.

<sup>56</sup> Pharaoh hardened his own heart after the first five plagues. After that, his judgment was sealed and God hardened his heart.

## The Passover

Wednesday - Pages 50–52

After the ninth plague, Pharaoh told Moses if he ever saw him again, he would kill him. Moses announced the tenth and final plague: at midnight, every firstborn male of Egypt would die.

Moses told the Israelites what they must do to escape the plague that night.

8. (a) What kind of animal were the Israelites to slaughter (Exodus 12:21)? (b) What were they to do with the animal's blood (12:22)? (c) What would happen when the destroyer came to Egypt (12:23)?

The Israelites followed Moses' command.

9. (a) What happened at midnight (Exodus 12:29–30)? (b) How did Pharaoh respond to the tenth plague (12:31–32)? (c) What indication is there in Pharaoh's words that he realized God was greater than he?

Judgment came, and the nation which had murdered Hebrew sons now lost their own.

## The Deliverance

Thursday - Pages 52–55

The Lord led the Israelites in a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. Meanwhile, Pharaoh changed his mind about letting the Hebrew slaves leave. He pursued them with chariots, horsemen, and troops, finally hemming them in next to a sea. The Israelites cried out in fear.

10. (a) What did Moses tell the Israelites to do (Exodus 14:13–14)? (b) What would the Lord do (14:14)? (c) What do we learn about God from this?

11. Summarize how the Lord fought for the Israelites (Exodus 14:15–29).

Something important happened that day: The Israelites learned that the Lord was God and had power to save.

12. (a) In whom did the Israelites put their trust (Exodus 14:30–31)? (b) Would they have trusted as much if Pharaoh had let them go easily so there was no need for a miraculous salvation? (c) Word of God's miraculous salvation spread all around;<sup>57</sup> what did that tell people of other nations? (d) If possible, describe a difficulty you went through that helped others see God's glory.

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<sup>57</sup> Joshua 2:10–11.

## The Journey

Friday - Pages 55–57

The angel of the Lord led the Israelites towards Mount Horeb, where Moses had encountered the burning bush. But the people's memory was short. They focused not on their destination, but on the difficulties of their journey.

13. (a) As they trekked through the desert, what did the people do (Exodus 16:2)? (b) What things slipped from their memory that enabled them to speak as they did (16:3)?<sup>58</sup> (c) We're on a journey to the heavenly Promised Land. What things slip from our memory when we grumble against God?

In the midst of barren desert, God caused manna to appear each morning to feed the multitude. Once again, God proved he was able and willing to carry out his promise to deliver the people to the Promised Land.

Fed by manna, the people traveled for three months to Mount Horeb.<sup>59</sup> When nearly there, the angel of the Lord led the Israelites to camp in a waterless spot, and they again doubted God.

14. (a) Instead of asking God for water or patiently waiting, what did the people do (Exodus 17:2)? (b) What question did the people ask that tested God (17:7)? (c) How had God already answered that question? (d) Of what else did they accuse Moses and God (17:3)? (e) Was that a valid accusation? Why or why not?

15. (a) How did the Israelites' grumbling show lack of faith? (b) What could they have done to nurture their faith instead of their doubts?

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<sup>58</sup> Consider what they'd cried out for God to rescue them from, what they'd seen of God's power and care, and where God promised to take them.

<sup>59</sup> Exodus 19:1.

There near the base of Mount Horeb—the holy Mountain of God—God instructed Moses to strike a rock, and when he did, out flowed water.

16. (a) How did Moses' obedience to God grow his faith between the time God first called him from the burning bush on Horeb until he returned to the mountain? (b) What is a practical way you can nurture your faith today, based on what you learned from Moses and the Israelites?

God told the people to commemorate their deliverance with an annual feast called Passover. Families reenacted events and ate a meal of an unblemished roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast.<sup>60</sup> Parents told their children how on the day of Egypt's judgment, the destroyer passed over all who trusted in lamb's blood so that God might deliver them from slavery to Egypt.

God commanded the Israelites to celebrate this Passover yearly so that they would remember his power to deliver ... and so that they would recognize the true Passover Lamb when he came. For there will be a final Judgment Day in which another destroyer will pass over all who have trusted in that Lamb's blood so that God might deliver them from slavery to sin and death. That story is coming, but first we continue with God's revealing of himself to Abraham's descendants.

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<sup>60</sup> Exodus 12:5–8. Moses interspersed instructions about the annual ceremony with the actual telling of the story.

# T H E S T O R Y

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

## *Chapter 5: New Commands and a New Covenant*

**Key Question:** How do we fulfill the purpose to which God has called us?

### **Kingdom of Priests**

*Monday - Pages 59–61*

Three months to the day after escaping Egyptian slavery, the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai.<sup>61</sup> God told Moses to explain that to which he was calling them.

1. (a) What had the Israelites seen, and what did this tell them about God (Exodus 19:4)? (b) God was about to offer to make a covenant—or contract—with the Israelites. What was the Israelites' part of the covenant (19:5a) (c) If they did that, what would they become (19:5b–6)?

God called the Israelites to obey his commands and be his treasured possession—a nation he cared for and blessed. They would be a kingdom of priests—a people set apart for God's service, making him known to all people groups, and teaching what was right and wrong in God's eyes. They would be a holy nation—a land set apart for God's purpose.

But to fulfill their calling, they had to obey God fully. Only then could other nations see the result and wisdom of God's laws.<sup>62</sup> Moses later explained it this way:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Mount Sinai is probably another name for Mount Horeb, where Moses had seen the burning bush.

<sup>62</sup> Jesus later told his disciples that if they held to his teaching (that is, obeyed him), then they would know the truth and the truth would set them free from slavery to sin (John 8:31–34).

<sup>63</sup> Deuteronomy 4:5–8.

The New Testament tells us Christians are likewise “chosen...for obedience to Jesus Christ.”<sup>64</sup> It says, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

2. (a) God chose you for obedience to Jesus; how can you fulfill this purpose? (b) God calls you to be a royal priesthood. A priest’s duties are serving God, proclaiming God, teaching what is right and wrong according to God, and guiding others to the mercy of God. Briefly describe one way you’ve fulfilled that purpose. (c) God calls Christians to be a holy nation—a people set apart to serve God and experience his blessings. How are you fulfilling that purpose? (d) God calls you to belong to him; what does that mean to you? (e) What praises can you declare about God as a result of his calling you out of darkness and into light?

From the base of Mount Sinai, God spoke.

3. (a) What did the people see and hear as God spoke (Exodus 20:18)? (b) How did they react (20:18–19)? (c) Why do you think they feared they might die if they continued to hear God’s thunderous voice? (d) Moses told them not to fear dying then, for that wasn’t the purpose of these signs. What was the purpose (20:20)?

A child might know her parent loves her and wants the best for her, and yet fear her loving parent’s discipline if she does wrong; that fear keeps her safe from the consequences of wrongdoing when she doesn’t yet understand the reason for her parent’s commands. The Israelites had come from a land that neither knew nor followed God’s laws, and they weren’t going to understand God’s reasoning behind all of them. They needed to understand that God’s power to punish rebellion was real.

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<sup>64</sup> 1 Peter 1:2, 15.

*Chapter 5: New Commands and a New Covenant*

4. (a) Does fearing fire's ability to harm cause you to avoid it, or to handle it safely? Explain.  
(b) Similarly, how does fearing the consequences of disobeying God keep people from sin?  
(c) Should the fear of God cause us to avoid God or avoid sin? Explain. (d) As some Israelites grew to know God's love and to trust his intentions, how would their motivation not to sin change?

Moses had already chosen to obey God even when he didn't understand the reasons, and he had seen God act powerfully, benevolently, and faithfully. Consequently, he trusted God and didn't fear approaching him. Therefore, the people begged Moses to mediate between them and God as they "remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Exodus 20:21.



## The Ten Commandments

Tuesday - Pages 61–62

God gave the terms of the covenant he offered.

5. (a) Who would be the parties to the covenant, and what was their relationship (Exodus 20:2)?  
(b) Why was it important for the Israelites to remember what God had already done for them?  
(c) When we are tempted to disobey God, why is it important to remember what God has already done for us?

God's first four commands told the Israelites how they should relate to him.

6. (a) What was the first commandment (Exodus 20:3)? (b) What was the second commandment (20:4)?  
(c) How would their ability to fulfill their purpose be hindered if they disobeyed these commands?  
(d) Greed is idolatry.<sup>66</sup> In fact, anything we put before God is an idol, and any time we disobey God we do so because we put something else before God. Name an area of temptation and what the idol is behind that temptation.

7. (a) What is the third commandment (Exodus 20:7)? (b) Why is it important to treat God's name respectfully and with honor, not using it in meaningless exclamations or curses? (c) What is the fourth commandment (20:8–9)? (d) Do you have a day<sup>67</sup> each week for attending church? (e) How might a weekly day of rest benefit us?

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<sup>66</sup> Colossians 3:5.

<sup>67</sup> The Sabbath is from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. Most Christian churches hold church services on Sunday in celebration of the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10).

*Chapter 5: New Commands and a New Covenant*

God's last six commands told how the Israelites should relate to each other.

8. (a) How are the fifth through tenth commandments ways to love others (Exodus 20:12–17)? (b) Pick two of the commands and briefly describe an incident for each where you or someone else didn't follow it and thereby hurt others<sup>68</sup> (please don't give names if the incident is not public knowledge). (c) How might knowing the hurt that disobedience causes help us to choose obedience and trust God? (d) How can disobeying the tenth command lead to disobeying the other commands?

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<sup>68</sup> One of the ways we come to know good and evil is by seeing what results from them, not just in our own lives, but in the lives of all we know.

## The Covenant

Wednesday - Pages 62–64

Along with the Ten Commandments, God gave Moses the Book of the Covenant.<sup>69</sup> Moses repeated the Lord's commands and laws to the Israelites, and they agreed to obey them. He wrote everything down.

The next morning, Moses built an altar to God and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. He sacrificed animals and sprinkled half the blood on the altar.

9. (a) What did Moses do next (Exodus 24:7a)? (b) How did the people respond (24:7b)? (c) What did Moses do after that?

In ancient times, covenant making involved oaths accompanied by blood sacrifice. The blood symbolized the parties' agreement that they deserved death if they broke the covenant. Thus the Lord God made a covenant<sup>70</sup> with the Israelites and they became his people.

God called Moses up Mount Sinai where he remained forty days and forty nights while God showed him how to make a tabernacle, furnishings for worship, and the ark of the covenant. He also gave him instructions on the priesthood and how to worship him acceptably.

10. (a) When the Israelites had made everything, what would God do (Exodus 25:8)? (b) How were they to make the tabernacle and furnishings (25:9)?

The tabernacle was a copy of a real, heavenly tabernacle, and therefore Moses had to ensure the Israelites made it just as God had instructed.<sup>71</sup>

When God finished speaking to Moses, he wrote the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets.

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<sup>69</sup> The Book of the Covenant is Exodus 21:1–23:19.

<sup>70</sup> Christians now call this the “Old Covenant.”

<sup>71</sup> Hebrews 8:5.

## The Golden Calf

Thursday - Pages 64–67

The Israelites weren't expecting Moses to be gone so long, and they began to doubt he would return. They told Aaron to make them a god to lead them.

11. (a) What did Aaron make with the people's gold jewelry (Exodus 32:4)? (b) What did they say about it? (c) How is this similar to someone promising to follow God if God delivers them from something, but after the deliverance reneges and claims the deliverance came from another source (such as luck or their own skill)? (d) How is this similar to someone receiving something prayed for, but attributing the answered prayer to something else?

Forty days after making their covenant with the Lord God, the Israelites broke it.

Moses descended the mountain and in disbelief beheld dancing and revelry and bowing before a golden calf. He hurled the stone tablets to the ground. They shattered, symbolizing the broken covenant. He cried out for any who were still for the Lord. The Levites ran to him. He told them God's judgment, and they put to the sword three thousand of those who had broken their oath to worship the Lord God alone and make no idols.

The next day Moses went before the Lord to intercede for the people.

12. (a) What did Moses ask God to do if he would not forgive the Israelites their sin (Exodus 32:32)? (b) Would God do this to Moses (32:33)? (c) Nonetheless, what consequences would come (32:34)?

The Lord kept a book with the names of those who were truly his—for not all descendants of Israel were such.<sup>72</sup>

God told Moses to lead the people to the Promised Land—he would not wipe them out. But he said he would not go with them.

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<sup>72</sup> Later God will reveal more about the book of life, for the Promised Land to which God was bringing the Israelites was a type of a heavenly dwelling promised to those whose names are written in the book of life. See Romans 9:6.

## The Glory of the Lord

Friday - Pages 67–70

Moses went into the tent where he regularly met with God to intercede for the people and ask God to go with them on their journey.

13. (a) What had God told Moses about their relationship (Exodus 33:12b)? (b) Why did Moses want God to teach him his ways (33:1)? (c) How does learning God's ways help us to know God and honor him? (d) How can we learn God's ways? (e) How did God respond (33:14)? (f) What does that teach us about intercessory prayer?

After this assurance, Moses asked to see God's glory. God told him to ascend to the top of Mount Sinai the next day with two more stone tablets to replace the broken ones. Moses did so.

14. (a) What did the Lord proclaim when he descended in a cloud (Exodus 34:5)? (b) When he passed Moses, how did he describe himself (34:6–7)? (c) What does this description tell you about your relationship with God? (d) The Lord repeated part of the fifth commandment: people were to honor their parents, but not by following them into sin.<sup>73</sup> What would happen if people chose to repeat the sins of their parents or grandparents<sup>74</sup> (34:7b)?

Moses worshipped God, and God wrote the Ten Commandments on the two new stone tablets. Moses stayed on Mount Sinai another forty days, pleading with God on behalf of the people.<sup>75</sup> When he finally descended, his face was radiant.

He guided the people in making the tabernacle, furnishings, and ark of the covenant. When they finished, he placed the stone tablets in the ark and placed the ark in the holy of holies within the tabernacle.

15. When all was completed, what happened (Exodus 40:34–35)?

The Israelites were now ready to set off for the Promised Land where they could fulfill their purpose of being a kingdom of priests making the Lord God known to the world.

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<sup>73</sup> Exodus 20:5–6; Deuteronomy 5:9–10.

<sup>74</sup> This verse does not mean the innocent will be punished for their ancestors' sins, but rather that those who choose to continue in their ancestors' sins will receive the same punishment as their ancestors (Deuteronomy 24:16). For more on this topic, see <http://jeanejones.net/2012/05/sins-of-the-fathers/>.

<sup>75</sup> Deuteronomy 9:25.